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"I'M GOING ON DECK WITH THE TELESCOPE."

Entangled; or, A Dangerous Game.

BY HENRIETTA THACKERAY.

CHAPTER I.

LUCIE FERRAMORE WARNS HER HUSBAND.

"IT is really too bad. It is more than I can bear. The heartless, shameless woman! How can George be so duped? Would he, did he indeed love me, his wife?"

The speaker was a fair, pretty woman, of about two-and-twenty. Her features, delicately formed, were pure and sweet of expression; her dark gray eyes tender, gentle, and caressing; her figure middle-height, slender, and graceful.

She was one of those fragile-looking women who in happiness

accept a husband's support, but who in times of trouble and affliction become a stay and support to him.

Seated apart under an awning on the deck of the Peninsular and Oriental steamer *Hesperus*, she appeared to be reading; but, in fact, her eyes, beneath the shadow of her long lashes, were watching two figures—those of a lady and gentleman, who, leaning over the side of the vessel, were talking gayly, as they gazed while passing at the shores of Spain, which the ship was passing.

The lady was the very reverse of that other under the awning. Tall, her figure was rather largely developed, and commanding more than graceful.

Her complexion was brunette; her features handsome; her lips full and pouting; her eyes dreamy and languishing, though capable of sending quick glances from under their deep ebony fringe of lashes, which few masculine hearts would be able to receive unmoved.

Her companion was a well-made, military-looking man of eight-and-twenty, with the easy, well-bred air of one accustomed to the best society.

In a word, Major Ferramore's regiment was known to possess the handsomest officers in the whole British army; and Major Ferramore was acknowledged to be the handsomest man in his regiment.

A little over a year ago he had married, in Calcutta, Lucie Markham—carrying her off from twenty other suitors; and now was returning to England with his young wife on a twelvemonth's leave.

Among the passengers—unfortunately for Lucie Ferramore's happiness—was Mrs. Arthur Greville, a young widow.

Her beauty, the homage she seemed tacitly to exact, and all seemed equally tacitly to pay, soon won her the chief attention on board.

Even the middies were in love with her; while if the safety of the ship had depended on the first mate, whose heart was most susceptible to feminine charms, the *Hesperus* would not unlikely have gone to the bottom of the Mediterranean.

Mrs. Greville flirted with all; but her chief and most dangerous glances were leveled at Major Ferramore.

With the audacity of a vain, selfish, beautiful woman, she triumphed in her ability to attract the handsome officer from the side of his pretty, gentle wife.

Yet, in pronouncing Lucie Ferramore "weak and inane," Mrs. Greville totally misread her.

The young wife was too proud to enter into rivalry with one whom her keen, unblinded woman's judgment divined to be utterly unworthy the contest.

Major Ferramore called Mrs. Greville Juno, Semiramis. The others called her Cleopatra, and him Antony.

Lucie called her Lamia; and she alone, of all, was right.

Her own bearing to the widow was civil, but not familiar.

She assumed that self-esteem which seemed to imply it was impossible for her husband to be faithless, and in public watched his flirtation with apparently unruffled placidity.

She allowed none to see—not even the Major—the misery, the doubt, the jealousy of the heart that was wholly devoted to him.

Even now, as she caught the sound of his laughter, and saw his eyes bent with unmistakable admiration on the widow, dressed superbly and in perfect taste, she shivered convulsively.

Her small lips tightened; her white, slender fingers spasmodically gripped the book she held, and she murmured the sentences which opened this chapter.

It grew altogether too unbearable passively to watch, when she perceived Mrs. Greville, as if unconsciously, place her hand on the Major's, while with the other she called his attention to some object on the shore.

Too unbearable altogether when she beheld the glance he turned upon the siren, and how she seemed intentionally to droop her sunshade, as though to conceal those two heads from view.

Rising, Lucie descended to her cabin.

She was not perceived, for the rest of the passengers—there chanced not to be many—were occupied in their own diversions.

Throwing herself on a chair, hiding her face, she exclaimed, with a little sob, "Oh, it is hard! Only so short—short a time married, and George no longer loves me!"

"But no," she added, passionately; "he does not love this woman no more than she—vain, heartless, selfish—a Lamia—a serpent in woman's guise—cares for him! He is fascinated—led on by her. That is not love."

She stopped abruptly. A sadness overspread her face.

"No," she murmured, "it is not love as yet. But under that evil woman's influence, to what may it not lead? To love, perhaps, on his part; then to his wretchedness and mine."

She raised her head, listening.

There was a step on the companion-stairs. It was her husband's.

He had missed her then.

He had not grown so indifferent as not to have done that.

A smile of wifely pleasure played in Lucie's eyes; but she controlled it as Major Ferramore entered.

"Why, Lucie," he exclaimed, "are you, on such a lovely morning, sitting alone in this stifling cabin?"

"I am getting so accustomed to my own society, George, as not to mind it," was the quiet answer. "If not very pleasant here, this cabin presents nothing to pain me."

He had been advancing toward her, but at this stopped.

"What do you mean, Lucie?" he asked, rapidly.

"Do you not know?—surely you must." And calmly she met his gaze.

"Most surely I don't," he retorted, with slight brusqueness, averting his gaze, however.

"Your flirtation with Mrs. Greville?"

Despite his effort, his cheek went red. Then he broke into a laugh.

"Why, what folly is this? Lucie, for Heaven's sake, dear"—and he threw his arm around her—"don't play the jealous wife, and look glum, or frown, or pout, directly your husband ventures to compliment a pretty woman; and, by Jove! Mrs. Greville is a deucedly handsome woman—you must confess that."

"I confess that she is a vain, heartless, evil-minded woman," replied Lucie, gravely, "who is as greatly amused as I am pained by your admiration."

"What do you imply, Lucie?" exclaimed the Major, his face darkening as he released her.

"That you are the handsomest, and the highest in status, among the passengers. Were there a handsomer and a higher, Mrs. Greville would neglect you—especially if that other had a wife, over whom Mrs. Greville could triumph in attracting him."

"Good gracious, what absurdity! Lucie, you are jealous!" added the Major, testily. "And if there be one thing I hate more than another, it is, allow me to assure you, a jealous woman."

"George!"

Lucie could not help it; her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears. In a moment he was by her side, his arms about her, and he pressed a kiss on her cheek.

"Forgive me, darling!" he ejaculated, penitently. "I did not mean that—that is, I did not mean—I know you are not jealous. You are sure I could care for no one as I do for you. Are you not my wife?"

"Oh, George!" she answered, clasping him about the neck, and gazing eagerly, fondly, into his face, "pray never—never give me cause to regret that, for your happiness or my own. Husband, I know you better than you do yourself. I know this Mrs. Greville better than you do. Both of you are playing a dangerous game."

In the widow's case Lucie little guessed how true were her words.

"What do you mean, dear? This all sounds very absurd," remarked Major Ferramore, trying to assume a careless gayety.

"That this woman is as clever as she is beautiful. That all she thinks of is conquest. You do not love her; I am certain of that. But it is her wish to make you believe you do; and if you continue your acquaintance with her, she will succeed. Oh, husband, for both our sakes, be warned!"

Earnestly she pleaded, by look and voice. And her sweet, pure, womanly expression made her more lovely than twenty Mrs. Grevilles.

"What would you have me do, Lucie?" said George Ferramore. "Remember, we are on shipboard. I cannot cut the woman now; I have no excuse for that. For pity's sake, love, don't ask any thing of me that would make me look a fool."

"I am not likely to do that."

"No. Then what am I to do?"

"Merely" (and Lucie glanced smilingly up at him) "give for the future a little more atten-

tion to your wife and a little less to Mrs. Greville, who, though a widow is as cruel a coquette as a girl of nineteen."

"There, my dear, I protest you are wrong," broke in the Major. "You have taken a dislike to Mrs. Greville. I fancy"—and he tapped his wife's soft, round cheek—"that you are just a little jealous, after all. And jealousy is always biased."

"Well, George, so let it be; I am jealous; therefore, have compassion on me," laughed the young wife. "Supply not food for the green-eyed monster to feed upon."

"All right. You shall be obeyed. Still, I cannot help talking to Mrs. Greville."

"Of course not, George."

"Then the matter's ended," remarked the Major, evidently with relief, as, kissing Lucie again, he turned away, lighted a cigar, and threw the fusee out of the cabin window.

He talked awhile to his young wife; then grew silent, preoccupied, restless. Lucie had got him to hold a skein of silk; she was winding, and he showed increasing irritation over the tangles, and the slowness of the process.

At this juncture a clear contralto voice was heard, humming, in a mezzo tone, "Ever of Thee," as its owner passed the cabin door.

There was a pause in the tune, which had brought a flush to the officer's brow. Then a full, rich, musical voice called, "Don't, pray, let me disturb you, Major Ferramore, nor Mrs. Ferramore; but Gibraltar is in sight, and I am going on deck with the telescope."

The song was resumed. The speaker was heard to ascend the stairs. Lucie raised her eyes to her husband; confused, he had risen to his feet, shaking the tangled silk from his fingers. Not meeting her gaze, he yet answered its inquiry.

"I can't help going this time, Lucie. Not to follow her would be an act of rudeness I could not perpetrate. It's—it's an appointment. I promised, as we passed Gib, to describe the place to her; for, you know, I was once in garrison there. Why, Lucie, do you not also come?"

He did not even wait for her reply. He quitted the cabin, and she heard him ascend the stairs two at a time.

Uttering a low cry of misery, she fell back in her chair.

"Could he ever have loved me? If so, it is passed. I have no control—no power over him. Oh, George!—George, my husband!—and for you I could have died!" she moaned, burying her face, wet with tears, in her handkerchief.

CHAPTER II.

FOUNDERING—MRS. GREVILLE DOES NOT PLEAD IN VAIN—DROWNED OR SAVED?

THAT bright sunny day, when the *Hesperus* streamed through the Straits, apparently was the climax of the fine weather which had been enjoyed since the starting from the Bay of Bengal.

Before reaching the Bay of Biscay, the "dirty weather" had settled into almost a gale from the south-south-east. The gale increased, after a few days, to a hurricane—such as upon rare occasions visit Europe, recalling those of the tropics—and, unable to beat up the channel, the captain had to drive before the tempest out of his course.

The affairs of those on board in whom the reader is interested had undergone small alterations.

The glamour cast by Mrs. Greville over Major Ferramore was, Lucie saw, though not so open, as strong as ever. Kind and attentive to his wife he ever was, and she did not stoop to plead again.

"If his love is not sufficient to make him save me from pain," she murmured, sadly, "then will no prayers of mine do so. Let me wait until we reach England. This woman goes to Cornwall, to her estate. We to London. We may never again meet, unless—unless"—her small lip quivered convulsively—"he follows her! She has asked us to her estate; but I have persuaded him not to go.

I," she added, with a wan, bitter smile—"what power have I over my husband, when *she* beckons? Heaven have mercy upon me, and him!"

Lucie let George Ferramore see none of her misery, and he was too occupied to read it beneath the sweet, calm surface.

Her affection never wavered. How could it, when he was all in all to her then, and so would ever be? He was blind to this brave devotion through all his madness, now. Hereafter he was doomed to recall, to ponder over it with bitter remorse and grief.

To return to the hurricane.

As night settled down it reached its height. In a mighty turmoil of foam and high tumbling billows, the *Hesperus* staggered, reeled, and drove onward, refusing to answer the helm.

Huge masses of black storm-wrack flew across the heavens so rapidly, that the eye grew dizzy in contemplating them. The fierce wind tore over and made havoc with all, lulling at times into a purring murmur, like some beast of prey preparing for a spring, then rising swiftly, and with shriek and howl lashing the sea into wilder fury, while the pale moon gleamed occasionally through some black cloud-rift, as if terrified at the war beneath.

None on board the *Hesperus* went to their berths that night. Until now the captain had spoken cheerfully; but this time, when they had proposed sitting up, he had not negatived the proposition. He had sat silent, a grim, gray, earnest expression on his weather-beaten face.

Hour after hour passed, and familiarity began, in some of the passengers, to deaden fear. They had battled successfully so long, why not then to the end? Daylight would soon be there.

Thus, in a measure, comforted, a few, worn out by fatigue, had dozed on the couches; others had sought their cabins; the remainder sat in small groups conversing in whispers, or listening to the howling tempest and the tramp of the sailors overhead.

Among the latter were Major Ferramore and his young wife. Lucie, calm and still, but white with terror, leaned on his shoulder, his arm encircling her waist.

Nearly opposite sat Mrs. Arthur Greville; her pomegranate lips bloodless and compressed; her dark eyes dilated, fixed vaguely before her, her small hands clenched.

What was that?

A shock so violent, so sudden, it awakened the sleepers, and flung all from their seats.

What was it?

The *Hesperus* had struck on some hidden rock! Would she right herself? Had the engines power enough to back her off that danger?

Yes; she was again afloat.

Thank Heaven!

All began to breathe more freely. The question was, could she be kept from driving again upon the breakers?

No; that was not the question. It was not even the danger—that they learned quickly, when the mate abruptly entered, his waterproof overclothes dripping with sea-water.

"What is it?" demanded a dozen voices.

"Be calm, ladies and gentlemen!" he said. "Remember that obedience to the captain's orders at such a moment can alone assure your safety. Come on deck—they are going to lower the boats—all we have left of them," he added, *sotto voce*.

Calm! How could they be? Something, a blending of a scream, a cry, a sob, burst from the women, as all, starting to their feet, made for the stairs. Major Ferramore, half supporting, half carrying his wife, was the nearest, therefore, almost the first to reach them. As he passed the mate he whispered quietly, "We have sprung a leak, haven't we?"

"Yes, Major, the *Hesperus* is foundering."

Quietly as the words had been spoken, the keen ears of terror had read them even, it seemed, from the motion of the lips.

A fearful cry arose.

"We are sinking! We are sinking! The ship is going to the bottom."

A terrible confusion at once ensued. Men and women pushed and struggled, making their way to the deck. The boats were their only chance. They would not stop to be drowned below like rats.

"Fear not, Lucie! Be calm, my girl, and keep your wits about you. As Saunders said, it is our only chance," remarked the officer to his wife, as he bore her apart from the struggling, maddened crowd. "If we are to die, dear Lucie, let us meet death bravely."

"And together," answered the young wife kissing the face that bent over her. "George," and her fingers gripped tightly his hand, "I will not leave you. Do not ask me. If they want to put the women in the boats first, I will not go. If you remain, I remain; if you die, I die. Less bitter death than to live alone."

He stooped and kissed her, unable to speak.

Then, in silence, they waited the result.

They saw the boat being lowered, and the crew keeping back the excited passengers. They heard the command, "the women first," followed by a cry of despair. The boat on reaching the water had been flung against the ship's side, and stove in.

Major Ferramore had not said no to his wife's determination; yet, nevertheless, had not intended to yield to her devotion.

At the fitting moment he had reckoned to bear her forward. He knew the hands which would be extended to receive, and that she would be in the boat before she could resist.

Now, however, he saw there would be small chance of any being saved. The way the *Hesperus* rolled showed she was fast filling, and soon must founder. There was but one remaining boat, which might not escape the fate of the other. Then all hope would soon be over, for their rockets had not been answered from the shore.

If saved at all, it must be by their own exertions. Thank Heaven! he could swim. Looking round, he beheld pieces of spar held yet to the deck by cordage. Lashed to one of those pieces, Lucie might easily float to land. To secure her and himself would not be difficult, for owing to the ship becoming water-logged, it pitched far less.

As he arrived at this resolve, a figure came staggering toward them, clutching anything within reach for support.

It was Mrs. Greville.

Her long black hair was tossed wildly by the wind about her beautiful face, which was pallid with terror. Her dilated eyes appeared to emit light. Never had she looked so strikingly handsome.

The Major started as he beheld her. Lucie shivered, and instinctively clung closer to her husband.

On reaching them, Mrs. Greville, flinging herself down on the wet deck and clasping the officer's knees, cried, in accents of piteous, wild entreaty, "Save me—save me, Major Ferramore! Do not leave me on this ship alone! Think! I am a solitary weak woman, with none to care for or aid me! Oh, show mercy to me!"

"How can I save you, Mrs. Greville—I, who may not myself be saved?" he answered, tremulously, moved by her appeal—her despair. "The boat!"

"Swamped. Oh, Heaven! Major Ferramore, must I drown—must I? Can you not help? Oh, save me—save me!"

Madly she beat her hands on the deck, then looked quietly up as Lucie's calm tones reached her.

"For shame, Mrs. Greville! You are in no worse plight than the rest of us. We all may drown!"

"Not you! He will save you! I am alone! Oh, merciful powers!"

The cry was a shriek of despair as she bent her head to the deck, her long hair trailing about her.

Major Ferramore turned as pale as death. No, he could not leave her. He would save her, too!—there was time. "Lucie," he said, "stay here a moment."

"George," cried the wife, in terror, "what would you do?"

She strove to hold him, but he had broken from her. His knife in his hand, he was severing the cordage, releasing one of the spars. Mrs. Greville watched him with breathless eagerness.

"George," shrieked Lucie, "do you at such a moment desert me, who would not leave you? Is this woman, even in death, to separate us? Come back, if you love me!"

"Patience, Lucie—patience! There is time to save all!" he replied. "Mrs. Greville, come!"

In a second she had crawled to his side. Lucie made an effort to reach him also, but a sudden lurch threw her back; she had to cling for support.

The ship was settling fast.

The wife watched her husband rapidly lashing the widow to the spar.

"After all," she asked herself, "could he, a man, let this woman, as a woman, perish? Would it not be cowardly? He will come back to me—surely he will!"

Hardly had the thought passed her brain than the *Hesperus* heeled fearfully, but was righted by a tremendous billow breaking over the stern. Lucie uttered a piercing shriek, for, as the wave swept past, she saw Mrs. Greville cast her arms round the young officer, and both disappear over the side together.

"George—husband!" she screamed. "Do not leave me!" Frantically she rushed forward, intending to plunge in after them, but a strong hand held her back.

"Parted—parted!" she shrieked, ere she sunk on the deck. "In death, as in life, she has come between us!"

When Major Ferramore felt himself whirled over the side, and the widow's arms fastened tightly about him, he was powerless to resist.

The billows were tumbling over them, and they were sinking rapidly.

In a brief space, however, they rose again to the surface, when, almost fiercely, he exclaimed, "Why did you grasp me thus? What have you done?"

"Saved your life, thank Heaven! as you have mine!" was the siren's response.

"Saved! Better I had lost it!" he ejaculated. "I must—I will return!"

"It is too late!" and the speaker's arms tightened. "Major Ferramore, the ship is too far away!"

She was right. Yet he would have risked it, only, as they were flung up on the next wave, and he turned his eager eyes in the direction, to his horror he beheld the huge black hull of the *Hesperus* rise, reel, pitch forward and disappear.

In a second it had gone. The waves rose and fell over the place where it had been.

"Lucie—my wife!" shrieked Major Ferramore, and made one fierce struggle.

But the arms about him were not to be un-twined, and, for a few moments losing consciousness, his head drooped on the widow's shoulder.

Her words aroused him.

"Major Ferramore, would you have us both drown? I see the shore!"

Summoning back his strength, he saw in which direction lay the land, and struck out for it.

The tide was running in, it was true; but, owing to the nature of the coast, they drifted some way down before they were washed onto the beach.

Directly Major Ferramore felt firm footing, he grasped the spar, and drew it high up on the shore, then dropped insensible beside her whom he had saved.

When he came to, he found that dawn was breaking, and that his head was supported in some one's lap.

Looking up, he perceived it was Mrs. Greville, who, by the aid of his pocket knife, had freed herself from the spar. Major Ferramore, averting his face and covering it with his hands, groaned bitterly.

"I see; you have not yet forgiven me,"

murmured the rich tones of his companion, sadly. "You blame me for what I have done. How, Major Ferramore, could I have left you to die? I could not!"

"But my wife—my poor Lucie!" he moaned. "Better to have died with her!"

"You think so now, yet why should you? Die together! Why, had I not held you, that awful wave would equally have parted you—parted us" (and her voice vibrated) "all. Major Ferramore, but for your strong arm to guide, I should have been dashed—killed upon the rocks! Do you think I can repent saving you? I owe you my life! Am I—am I to regret it?"

He was silent. His hands were clenched on the beach, his face upon them.

Then he looked up, white and haggard.

"Regret is useless," he said, coldly. "It cannot recall the past. That must be borne as best I may. Come," he added, rising; "you are wet through. You will need rest and dry attire."

But, instead, she only rose to her knees, and, her beautiful face lifted, exclaimed, entreatingly, "Oh, forgive me—forgive me, Major Ferramore! Your look—your voice cut me to the soul! I cannot bear it!"

Leaning forward, he raised her, saying, "Rather pardon me, Mrs. Greville. I am wrong to blame you for an impulse which had its birth in—friendship. Yet do not wonder that I mourn my wife."

"Wonder! Major Ferramore, my heart bleeds for her. Mourn as you should, as she deserves—you have my sympathy."

She held his hand, and now lightly touched it with her lips before she released it. She felt a slight pressure of his fingers, and in silence they proceeded up the beach.

From its appearance and the position of the ship, the Major guessed the coast upon which they were to be Cornwall. The grandeur and bold ruggedness of the rocks proclaimed it, and they had much clambering over its jagged shore before a fisherman's hut came in view.

The officer approaching, supporting Mrs. Greville, whose strength began to fail her, found only an old woman within. Her "good man," she said, had gone down to Mill Bay, to the wreck, but she'd be happy to give the lady shelter, and any accommodation her cottage could afford.

The old fisher-wife had a true Cornish type of face, and keen, dark, searching eyes under her grizzled brows, which seemed to recall the times when wreckers nestled along the Cornish shore, as the sea-birds among its rocks. Perhaps it was her "uncannie" aspect that caused Mrs. Greville to grasp the Major's arm, and exclaim, "And you?"

"I shall proceed at once to Mill Bay," he answered, "to see if any one was saved."

"And that may be," put in the fisher-wife; "for I know the life-boat went out. Ah, in my young days nothing was known of life-boats in Cornwall."

"The life-boat did go out?" cried the Major. "That's good news, indeed! I feared our rockets had not been seen. How far is Mill Bay from here?"

"Well, I reckon, sir, when you've gone a mile and a quarter you'll have just done half."

"But you'll come back?" whispered Gertrude Greville, yet holding his arm, and looking pleadingly into his face with her dark, beautiful eyes. "I would go with you, but have not the strength. I should delay you. But you will not leave me here alone long with that horrible old woman—you will come back?"

"Of course I will, Mrs. Greville."

How could he resist her?

"Even—even if you find her?"

"Even if I find her—my wife; and," he added, fervently, "pray Heaven I may!"

She did not say "Amen!" She merely murmured, "Thank you," softly, and releasing him, moved to the hearth, while he, after one glance thrown back at her, having received the proper direction from the old fisher-wife, passed from the cottage.

His way lay along the road bordering the coast, so rugged and weather-beaten that all was barren and bare. To Major Ferramore's right lay the sea, yet lashing the shore with sullen moan, its surface marked by broad dark dashes, though the sun was shining.

As the officer reached the heights, he eagerly scanned the ocean for the wreck. But the Hesperus had foundered in deep water. Not a vestige of her was to be seen.

He shuddered, and a groan of agony burst from him, as he thought of his young wife. Covering his face, he sobbed aloud.

His young, his pretty wife, whom he had so loved—whom, fresh, gentle and bonnie, he had felt so proud of winning.

At that moment he did not give one thought to Gertrude Greville. The day seemed to have darkened; and he felt as one might be expected to feel whose good angel has been suddenly recalled from his side.

Then he thought of Gertrude Greville, and almost cursed her, as he remembered Lucie's dislike—poor Lucie, who was dead, gone from him forever!

No; why should he think that? Had not the fish-wife said the life-boat had been got off at last? Would not the women be the first saved, if—if the life-boat had arrived in time?

Major Ferramore would not think of that, but strode on more quickly, and finally from the height looked down into the bay.

There were groups of fishermen on the beach, also some portions of the wreck, which no man dared to touch, the salvage men having arrived, with others who had been attracted by curiosity, or to lend aid, while a few men and women were gathered in front of some low cottages under the cliffs.

Hurrying on, Major Ferramore, finding a path, hastened down to the beach. It brought him near the cottages first, and he addressed a woman, in husky tones, "Tell me, I entreat you, has any one been saved?"

"Ay, sir," was the reply, in strong Cornish accent, attended by a courtesy, "theer be some twenty poor souls—no more!"

"Can I see them?" exclaimed the Major, reeling beneath the news—"can I know their names?"

"Sure can thee," began the woman, when a young man, respectably dressed, issued from one of the cottages, with a paper in his hand, and made for the path. "There," said the fish-wife, "him yarnder can tell thee all. He's from th' papers, he says, he do, and has written 't all down in th' book."

As the Major hastened to overtake the member of the local press, the women stared after him, one remarking that "he looked as if he'd com'd out o' the wreck himself."

Hearing the quick step behind him, the young man turned, and, seeing the officer, raised his hat.

The Major answered the courtesy, as he said, "Pardon me, I hear you have the names of the saved. May I, sir, see the list?"

The other ran his eyes scrutinizingly over the speaker. If he had feared a rival correspondent on a rival paper in the Major, the latter's disheveled aspect and haggard face reassured him, and he at once replied in the affirmative, handing the list. As the husband took it, a mist swam before his eyes, and he staggered so that the young man caught him in his arms to save him from falling.

"You know some one on board, sir?" he said, sympathetically.

"Yes," murmured the Major, hoarsely—"some one who is very dear to me. I was on board myself, but—but we were separated in the wreck. I was washed ashore two miles away. Would you mind letting me accompany you to the heights? I"—and the speaker glanced back at the lounging fishers—"cannot read this here."

"Certainly."

Together they ascended the path. When at the top, hidden from view, Major Ferramore halted, and, turning away, with shaking hands holding the list, began its perusal. Why he could not have told, but he counted the names

first—counted without seeing them, for the mist was over his eyes again.

Then, with a beating heart, a wild hope, he read—read rapidly, until near the end; then slowly, as if fearing he might read incorrectly.

They were mostly feminine names.

Many he knew. A few belonged evidently to the second class, of whom he knew nothing.

But the name of Lucie Ferramore was not there.

"Are—are you sure you have all here—all that were saved?" he gasped.

"Certainly, sir. There were but twenty," and I have their names from their own lips. Naturally, each is anxious their names shall appear, for their friends' sake. There's not one, sir, I assure you but what I have got. I wish for your sake there was."

"Thank you," replied the Major. "Thank you much."

His voice broke.

He moved away to hide his emotion, when the other said, "Excuse me; may I have your name, sir?"

"Major George Ferramore," he answered. "Also, you may put Mrs. Greville. That lady was saved with me."

"Thanks, sir. Good-morning!" and penciling down the titles, he moved quickly away; for there was small time to get the account into that morning's first edition, and to telegraph it to London.

When he looked back, he saw Major Ferramore prone on the ground, his face buried on the short, dry grass, and his white hands clasped tightly at the back of his head, as some men do when torn by a terrible agony.

CHAPTER III.

A STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

WHEN Major Ferramore returned to the fisher's cottage he found Mrs. Greville, looking very pale and wan, sitting by the fire.

She glanced up as he entered, and even she started at his appearance—it was so ghastly, so full of wretchedness and despair.

"Well, dear Major Ferramore, what news? Good, I trust?" she murmured, her words speaking differently to her heart.

"No," he rejoined, not meeting her glance, but gazing down into the fire. "Twenty have been saved, but"—his voice shook—"she is not one."

"Oh!" ejaculated the widow, in an accent of piteous grief, burying her face in the cambric handkerchief she had been drying.

There was silence a space. Then, still not looking at her, he said, "When, Mrs. Greville, do you think you can proceed?"

"When? When you desire, Major Ferramore. At once."

"That is impossible," he answered. "You must have rest—your clothes dried. I am going on to the town, two miles distant. Shall I send a fly for you?"

"Yes; if you will not permit me to walk with you," she replied, almost humbly.

The tone touched him. He felt a brute, yet how could he remember any but his Lucie at such a time?

"I did not mean that," he said, turning toward her. "I thought you were not able to walk."

"I would sooner try, Major Ferramore, than stop here," she rejoined, rising as she spoke.

"I—I feel nervous. I should not like to stay here alone. Oh, do not think"—and instinctively she clasped her hands in entreaty—"I have suffered nothing this night!"

The voice was so plaintive, so musically beseeching, that it chilled him. It made him ashamed of himself.

Suffered? Yes, she must have suffered—this tender, delicate woman.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, taking her hand in his. "You must think me a bear. But all this is too, too terrible. I cannot speak of it! Pray let us go! The wash of that awful sea drives me mad!"

Without reply, but with a glance of gratitude more eloquent than words, Mrs. Greville obeyed.

Rewarding the fisher-wife handsomely, the two set forth.

There may have been moments when the Duchess of Marlborough, who stated that she was born before nerves were in fashion, has pretended to possess them.

Certainly Mrs. Greville did, and needed to lean very heavily on the officer's arm during the two miles' walk.

Before it was over she had managed to win kinder sentences from her companion—to make him feel a greater brute than ever, and to verge once more toward the net so skillfully spread for him.

Reaching the hotel, they rested until their garments were dried and strength somewhat restored, then together proceeded to Launceston.

There they separated.

Mrs. Greville alighted to proceed to her estate. He continued on to the metropolis; not, however, before promising to visit her shortly at the Holme.

"Believe me, Major Ferramore, no guest will be so welcome," she murmured, softly, as the train moved from the platform, accompanying the assertion by a glance, the power of which Gertrude Greville had well known.

"As if he would be able to keep away!" she smiled mockingly, when driving to an hotel. "Why, I could have brought him to my call even with his weak, pretty wife living! Now she is dead. I really think—and I have had some experience—these military men are the vainest creatures alive!"

Meanwhile, free from the beautiful widow's influence, Major Ferramore, leaning back in his corner of the carriage, gave himself up to his gloomy reflections.

Lucie's death had affected him very deeply. He had never known how much he had really loved her until now, and was glad of Mrs. Greville's absence that he might think of her.

He could not in the widow's society. Why not?

"I really believe she feels for me very much," he reflected; "and so takes a fellow out of himself! It was kind of her, too; so thoughtful to say, as she resided in Cornwall, she would take careful note of it—of all the—the bodies found, and inform me at once if my dear Lucie—"

He could get no further even in thought, for the large lump that seemed to rise in his throat and choke him.

It was evening when he reached London. The lamps were beginning to be lighted. Calling a hansom, he proceeded to Kensington.

There, in a roomy, detached, walled-in, red-brick house, lived his own relations, an uncle and aunt.

It had been arranged that he and Lucie should stay there a fortnight before seeking apartments for themselves, when he was to have shown all the London sights to his young wife. Now how drear and miserable the time would pass!

Mr. and Mrs. Chichester were elderly and very kind-hearted. Warmly, sympathetically, they greeted their nephew.

"Oh, my poor George!—my dear boy!" exclaimed the old lady, then fairly burst out crying. "Oh! how you must have suffered! You look like a ghost! And Lucie, that pretty dear!"

"Please say no more," said Major Ferramore, with contracted brow and quivering lip. "I know you mean it kindly, aunt, but I can't talk about it yet."

"I should think not—I should think not!" broke in Uncle Chichester. "Quiet, Jannie. In his own good time George will tell us all. Poor young thing!—poor young thing! Dear, dear, dear!"

If the worthy couple didn't talk about the shipwreck, their looks told that it was always on their mind. They said words and started subjects which, at that moment, though they would not have seen the similarity at any other, they fancied suggested it, and would come to an abrupt, confused halt in their speech.

Finally Major Ferramore found it less painful to give the full account. He did not mention Mrs. Greville, and to himself his description seemed somewhat wretched and vague. They saw nothing of this; only, fondly patting his hand, Aunt Chichester said she was certain he had done the best to save his poor wife, and such other sentences, that sent keen stabs to his heart.

When Major Ferramore retired to his room, he thought he had never passed so wretched an evening.

"How some old people do like to talk of the miserables!" he muttered. "Such a life would drive me mad in a week. They have not the tact of Mrs. Greville!" he proceeded, leaning out of the window looking onto the garden to smoke his cigar. "She made me forget my trouble. They keep it ever fresh in my memory, like flies hovering around a galled wound."

As the smoke of his cigar curled upward he dropped into a reverie, in which Mrs. Greville played a part, the Chichesters having been the innocent cause of that.

Suddenly he threw his cigar away, and irritably came back into the room.

"I must crush these thoughts," he muttered. "It is sin to my Lucie's memory. What is the widow to me more than a friend? Only, I must get from here, or I shall have to fly to The Holme from very despair."

Major Ferramore was perfectly right. He did regard the widow as merely a friend. He liked her; was happy when in her company; but felt that, remembering Lucie's aversion—he no longer called it unaccountable—he had no right to indulge himself in it; it would be an insult to her memory.

He did not know it, but this was the turning point of his life. Had he in his grief met congenial society, he would have soon forgotten the widow—probably never seen her again. Indeed, she was one of those surface women who, like the snake, can only fascinate when their victim is within range of their vision.

Indeed, each hour her influence over the officer was getting weaker. Only the uncongenial, though sympathetic and doleful company of his worthy relatives forced him to recall and too much dwell upon that of Mrs. Greville.

The Major strolled down to his club the next day, and rather nervously, for he wondered whether any rumors had got abroad of how he, with a lady, had been washed ashore, while his wife was drowned. He feared how men might read it.

He found, however, no one there that he knew. So, after an hour's lounge, went back to Kensington.

Entering the drawing-room, he was surprised to see a young girl of graceful figure arranging some fresh-cut flowers in a vase.

She turned as he came in: then, a bright smile on her lips, and in her clear, frank, gray eyes, as he bowed ceremoniously, she extended her hand, saying, "Don't you know me, Cousin George?"

"Why, it can't be! Are you the wee, prim maiden, Maud Chichester, I left yet at boarding-school five years ago?" he exclaimed.

"No other," she smiled. "I have grown, have I not?"

"Yes, as beautiful as tall," he answered. "Maud, you are very pretty. How was it I did not see you last night?"

"Oh, I don't live here!" she laughed.

"You have come to stop, then, I hope?" he answered. "A pleasant oasis where all is so doleful."

"For a week," she answered. "Aunt and Uncle Chichester thought you might be dull, so asked me to come for a week, Cousin George."

"They were very kind and thoughtful. I feel grateful, I assure you," he smiled. "Pray go on with your roses, Maud, and I will help you."

The girl complied, and the conversation drifted freely and pleasantly on.

She was Major Ferramore's chance against

the widow. His sole one, because her pleasant, youthful society soothed him.

There was something in Maud Chichester's eyes that reminded him of Lucie. There was a soft sympathy in her accents. She strove, by well-placed not obtrusive cheerfulness, to win him from sad memories, and he found that he could talk to her of Lucie as he could talk of his poor, lost wife to no one else.

And Maud's frank confidence in him, while it pleased, seemed to make him feel a better man.

The evening came to an end, and the officer had not, even for a single moment, thought of Gertrude Greville; while, as he had watched Maud's fresh, sweet, innocent face, Lucie had never, for an instant even, been out of his mind.

"Why, for goodness sake, my dear Maud," he asked, entering the breakfast-room next morning, "why are you going to fly off in a week?"

The girl, laughing, looked down, blushed, and answered, "Why, I am going to Derby, to see Harry's friends."

"And who the deuce—I beg your pardon—is Harry?"

"Don't you know?" And she glanced slyly at him.

"I didn't," he laughed; "but I fancy now that I can guess. Harry must be the happy young fellow who has won Miss Maud Chichester as his prize in the matrimonial lottery. Harry must be my future cousin."

"Yes," she smiled, and told him all.

"I must know Harry, to congratulate him," he said; and took Maud to Regent street after breakfast, and purchased for her a wedding present. But the bright week went by, and the bright girl was gone.

Major Ferramore was once more sent back to his past thoughts. The dull Kensington house hipped and depressed him.

The remembrance of Delilah came stealing back, encircling him with Laocoön folds. He felt a craving upon him to fulfill his promise to visit The Holme.

He must go somewhere; his own society was intolerable to him; but how escape from that—how fly the thoughts he so desired to banish? He battled against the voice of the siren, which now again was constantly ringing in his ears.

One evening, however, as he was returning rather wearily to the Chichester dinner, the notes of a piano came to him from the open window of a villa he was passing.

Soon with the music was blended a voice, singing with sweet plaintiveness, "Ever of Thee."

It was Mrs. Greville's favorite song.

It recalled a hundred memories he could not conquer.

"I will write to-night!" he exclaimed, resolutely, as he flung his cigar away. "I can bear this no longer!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD FRIEND OF MR. ARTHUR GREVILLE'S.
AFTERNOON of a hot August day.

The welcome sea-breeze crept softly over the land, stirring the drawing-room window draperies of The Holme, and the delicate lace ruffles falling over Gertrude Greville's round, snowy arms, as she reclined on a lounge, her eyes dreamy and half-closed, gently moving the feather fan she held.

The Holme was a small, but compact estate, on the border line of the mine country.

Indeed, between it and the Cornish village extended a tolerable stretch of bleak, brown, barren moor, dangerously broken by the dark yawning mouths of long disused mine-shafts.

Fences had once been placed round these as protection, but time had gradually leveled them; and a reckless familiarity with danger, not rare in mining districts, had caused them never to be renewed or repaired.

Over twenty years ago, The Holme had, by inheritance, become the property of a Mr. Arthur Greville, a wealthy East India planter, who—the place having been let for a long

term to a well-to-do tenant, who regularly forwarded checks for the quarterly rents to his landlord—had not even bothered himself with the trouble of an English agent; Mr. Arthur Greville declaring that from experience, rather than be robbed by any of that fraternity, he would sooner risk being cheated by his tenant.

A year previously, however, the latter's lease having expired, he removed to London.

The Holme was not announced to let, but was shut up in charge of an old woman.

This elderly personage had made herself remarkably comfortable there for eleven months, when a letter arrived, bidding her set the place in order, hire the necessary servants, and in four weeks' time be in readiness to receive the writer, Mrs. Greville.

The news spread through the little community which formed the gentry of the place, and curiosity was rife, as no mention was made of Mr. Greville.

Was he dead? Nothing more likely, as all that was known of him was that he must be quite seventy—a great age for one who had passed his life and lost his liver in India.

In that case, Mrs. Greville was a widow.

Mrs. Greville arrived, and was a widow. Also she was young, beautiful, and agreeable, not to add rich; hence she was very well received by the gentry.

With the wisdom of a clear-headed woman, Gertrude Greville had secured her jewels and money upon her person at the first sign of the Hesperus being in danger.

Thus she had lost nothing but her wardrobe, which had been easily replaced.

On this August afternoon, Gertrude Greville, languidly fanning herself, was recalling all this, and the fact that more than six weeks had elapsed, and yet the Major made no sign. Gertrude Greville had given him four, to master his grief for Lucie.

He had already taken over six, and her pomegranate lips tightened with wounded pride.

At that moment the door opened, and the widow's companion entered.

She was a middle-aged lady, being apparently over forty.

Her slight figure seemed yet more so, owing to her age, and her black silk dress, which latter increased the fairness of her hands and complexion.

She wore thin gold rimmed spectacles, and her hair, of iron gray hue, was plainly braided down her face; while black lace formed a half-cap, half-mantilla, on her head.

She moved with a noiseless, gliding step. Her voice was low, and so even as to approach monotony.

In fact, Gertrude Greville's companion apparently possessed one of those placid, equable, passionless natures, that can no more be ruffled than the surface of a granite rock.

Yet her manner—graceful and refined—proclaimed her to be a perfect lady.

She carried letters in her hand, with which she advanced to her employer.

"The post has arrived at last, madam," she said, quietly. "It appears a goods train ran off the line, and for some hours blocked the way."

"Letters, Mrs. Hendricson!" exclaimed Gertrude, half rising quickly to receive them. "Who are they from?"

"I should find that difficult to tell, madam," said the companion, as she took her seat at a small work-table at the other side of the bay window, "being unable to see inside the envelopes."

"I meant, had they a gossipy, pleasant, or a business look?" remarked Gertrude, scanning the three. "Here is a blue-enveloped one; you may read that, Mrs. Hendricson, while I"—and a smile played over her face—"read this. "At last!" she murmured, as she dropped back on the lounge and broke the fastening of one of the letters.

The companion had soon finished hers. It was merely from an upholsterer in Launceston about some alteration in the library furniture. Letting down the note, she glanced across

at her employer. She yet was smiling; a pleased light danced in her eyes. It was evident that she had read the letter twice before, with a little, amused laugh, she said, "My dear Mrs. Hendricson, I must trouble you to see the Gray Room is prepared by to-morrow, for we shall have a guest more than we expect ed."

"A lady, madam?"

"Oh, dear, no; a gentleman!" laughed Gertrude. "No other than—well, yes, an old lover of mine. In fact, Major Ferramore, who, you know, saved me when the Hesperus was wrecked."

"Indeed! But will he stay at The Holme?"

"Why not? There will be company enough not to shock propriety," rejoined Gertrude, curling her beautiful lip. "Mr. and Mrs. Vane, with their daughter, arrive this evening; and to-morrow Mr. and Mrs. Helton; which, my dear Mrs. Hendricson, with your staid self, will be sufficient to silence scandal. We shall"—and she laughed musically—"be in full force to receive this most gallant and susceptible of her Majesty's officers."

The companion raised her eyes quickly in surprise.

"Pardon me, madam," she smiled; "but, a former lover, and now released from all married ties, I should imagine that Major Ferramore comes here to woo?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it."

"Your manner, however, appears to promise him little success."

"That is as it may be," answered Gertrude. "I am in no hurry to decide, Mrs. Hendricson, so time and the fashion of the Major's wooing must do so. But you will see to the Gray Room, please."

"Certainly. When did you say we might expect Major Ferramore?"

"To-morrow. Of course he will first stop at the village; and he writes," added Gertrude, consulting the letter carelessly, "he will give himself the pleasure of calling in the afternoon. Yes, stay; there's some mistake. This letter must have been delayed more than by the rail, for it is dated the 9th, in which case Major Ferramore's 'day after to-morrow' is to-day."

"Then, madam," said Mrs. Hendricson, rising and speaking in her low, monotonous tones, "I had better see to the Gray Room at once."

"By all means. Thanks."

The companion glided from the apartment, and noiselessly closed the door. There, however, her usual placidity underwent a slight change. She proceeded up the stairs with marvelous swiftness, and in lieu of giving orders respecting the Gray Chamber, proceeded to her own room, into which she locked herself.

Hardly had she quitted Gertrude than visitors were announced.

It was the rector, the Reverend Septimus Sheldrake, with his wife, and a Mr. Bryerton.

The rector was a portly five feet eight of clerical respectability, with a condescending air and woolly voice. His better half was a short, brisk, bright little woman, ready to attend to all the business of the parish before her own; while their friend was a thin, withered little man of nearly seventy, so brown and dry that he almost made one sneeze.

Gracefully, smiling graciously, Gertrude Greville advanced to welcome them. The rector took the lead—as he did in everything—and pressing the widow's fingers in his soft, plump hand, said woolily, "My dear Mrs. Greville, excuse this intrusion, I beg; but my friend here, learning, during his flying visit to me from the modern Babylon, that the widow of his dear old friend, Mr. Arthur Greville, lived so near, actually would not allow me a moment's rest—not a moment, dear madam—until I had given him the honor of an introduction."

Perhaps it was because the rector's fingers were so very soft and plump that he did not feel the hand held twitch suddenly. He did, however, notice that the red lip quivered, and lost some of its brilliant hue, as Gertrude Gre-

ville, with almost stately dignity, inclined her head to Mr. Bryerton.

"Sensitive creature—remarkably sensitive! Yet Greville was old enough to have been his grandfather!" reflected the rector. "There is really no accounting for the likings of pretty women."

"Your husband, Mrs. Greville, was indeed an old friend," smiled the newly introduced, as he bowed over Gertrude's hand like a beau of the ancient *regime*; "for we were school chums in England, and received our appointment from the East India Company together. But"—and Mr. Bryerton slightly raised his shoulders—"I was delicate, and used to say poor Greville had the constitution of a lion. The climate killed me. I came back; he remained, and gained a fortune. Now, here am I; and he is no more."

"My dear Bryerton," broke in the rector, "a gentleman who passed all his years without change in India, as did Mr. Greville, would need the constitution of an elephant. Mr. Greville, I am delighted to say, had that constitution, and he remained—exactly—and gained a fortune."

"He gained far more than that, my dear rector," answered Mr. Bryerton, with a courtly bow toward Gertrude. "He gained that which would induce any man to brave any climate to win."

During this, their hostess sat silent. Her dark eyes, from under the shadow of their lashes, turned from one to the other. A close observer might have noticed a contraction of the lips and of the folded hands.

"Once Mrs. Sheldrake addressed her. Either she did not hear or did not take heed. She did not answer.

"Was my poor friend's death, may I ask, sudden?" inquired Mr. Bryerton, sympathetically.

"Sudden? No—that is, not very?" responded Gertrude.

"Dear, dear! It seems but yesterday that he, a bright, hopeful young fellow, saw me off to England. Yet it's over forty years since we met, and twenty since we corresponded. May I ask if he was much changed? Did he reside in the old place?"

Gertrude had grown paler and paler; now rising, she said, somewhat abruptly, and with evident agitation, "Would you pardon me? Do, I entreat you; for, as, sir, you may imagine, this is a most painful subject." She passed her handkerchief across her face, then, with a faint, charming smile. "Do excuse me, Mr. Bryerton. I fear I must appear very rude."

"Not so, Mrs. Greville," he answered. "Mine would be the rudeness, did I take offense at a grief which does honor to my friend's memory."

"I thank you," she responded, gratefully.

The rector here broke in, to change the subject, "You must not go, my dear Bryerton, without seeing the apiary; it is just in perfection. I know I have Mrs. Greville's permission to show it to you."

Never had Gertrude felt more grateful to the rector than when she saw him pass out of the window with his friend.

"Highly sensitive nature, Mrs. Greville's—highly sensitive, poor creature!" he remarked, in his woolly accents.

"Exceedingly so," answered Mr. Bryerton, dryly. "Had Greville been the young fellow that he was when I first knew him, I could have understood it better. But thirty grieving for seventy!"

"Therefore such grief is the more to be honored when we come across it—eh, Bryerton?"

"Assuredly," smiled the other, as, thoughtfully, he followed the clergyman.

On their returning to the drawing-room, Mrs. Sheldrake broke off her long account of the Dorcas meeting, and rose to leave with the gentlemen. Gertrude was now quite her usual self again; and as she bade Mr. Bryerton good-morning, hoped, with a winning smile, to have the pleasure of again seeing him at The Holme.

"It is an honor" regret I must forego," was

the rejoinder, "as I leave Cornwall to-morrow. And it is not likely I shall ever find my way so far west again."

Gertrude's lips murmured sorrow, while her heart beat joyously. When they had gone, moving quickly to the couch, she sunk down, and, her hands clasped hard, muttered, "Who would have dreamt of meeting a friend of Arthur Greville's here? Why did the rector bring him? Thank Heaven, he will not come again."

She paused, her beautiful eyes riveted on the carpet, her white brows knit. Then she added, in a whisper, "It's a dangerous game—a very dangerous game! But I'll play it out!"

Leaning back, she buried her face in the velvet cushion, and became silent, motionless. Nearly an hour must so have passed, when she was startled by a slight sound—a thimble falling on the table.

She looked up quickly, and saw Mrs. Hendricson quietly at work in her usual place.

"I did not know you were here!" she exclaimed, somewhat sharply. "I did not hear you come in."

"I thought you were asleep; you were so quiet that I tried not to disturb you. The Gray Room is prepared; all is in readiness. Hark! there is the sound of wheels on the drive."

The companion rose as she spoke, and moved toward the window.

"Do not go!" exclaimed Gertrude. "It may be Major Ferramore."

Mrs. Hendricson returned, but did not resume her seat. She stood, one hand leaning on the chair-back. Footsteps in the hall; then the door opened, and Major Ferramore was announced. Clad in mourning, he was paler than his wont; but that only made him appear handsomer as, at the first glance, believing Gertrude to be alone, he advanced quickly, with great eagerness, to meet her.

But extending her hand quietly, she said, with the purpose of checking his impulsiveness, "A thousand welcomes, Major Ferramore, to The Holme, which I trust will not frighten you away by its dullness. Our present small party will soon be increased. Ah! it is so kind of you to come! Let me"—and she drew a little aside to avoid his earnest gaze—"introduce you to Mrs. Hendricson, my companion," she added, in a whisper.

Major Ferramore, a trifle confused—perhaps a trifle annoyed—at finding a third party present, turned and bowed to the quiet, middle-aged, staid lady in black silk, who—her white hand still on the chair-back—calmly responded to the inclination.

Thus the officer and Mrs. Hendricson met.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR FERRAMORE'S RIVAL.

GERTRUDE GREVILLE was right when she said there would be enough company at The Holme to prevent the proprieties being outraged by Major Ferramore's presence there. Hence his portmanteaux were transferred from the village inn to the Gray Room that same evening, on which also arrived the other guests—but very recent acquaintances of the widow's, yet pleasant, agreeable people, just the sort to make a country house cheerful.

Few hostesses could have better played their part and performed their onerous duties than Gertrude. Gay, light-hearted, apparently without a care, she moved as the lovely spirit of mirth, banishing melancholy from her path—moved, with Major Ferramore, her aide-de-camp, as she had jestingly styled him, ever in her wake.

"Though you are my oldest friend here, Major Ferramore," she had remarked, confidently, "our acquaintance is of no long date; but occurrences—sad ones, indeed—have made it seem as if for years we had known each other. Therefore, I venture to throw myself on your generosity, and ask your aid to amuse

these people. When they quit The Holme, let it be with pleasant memories."

"Command me, Mrs. Greville. I shall only be too flattered to place myself at your orders," responded the Major, bending to kiss the white hand that had been laid in his; "but am I so fortunate as to be reckoned only among your acquaintances?"

"Truly that is a cold term," remarked Gertrude, letting her lashes fall, "for one to whom I owe my life! If we, Major Ferramore, are not friends, who should be?"

"Who, indeed, Mrs. Greville! Gertrude," he murmured, lowering his voice, and stooping near her, "the one wish of my life is to be your friend—your nearest, your dearest. We have both suffered. We have been by Fate thrown together; drawn together yet more by a terrible danger—by confronting death itself. To me the world seems barren—a waste on which you and I alone exist. With you alone can I talk of that past; hence there is a tie between us that should make our friendship indissoluble."

Gertrude drooped her beautiful head, as with averted face, she answered, "That is so, Major Ferramore. Neither of us two can ever forget the past. In it we both have suffered. We both have lost those dear to us."

At those last words the officer drew back. He felt that they had been intended to recall to him that his loss had been too recent for more than friendship to exist between them—at least, openly—as yet. At any rate, so he read it; and again kissing the soft fingers, said no more.

A fortnight thus passed in a constant succession of pleasure. Gertrude's influence in the neighborhood increased daily. People began to be anxious for invitations to The Holme; while, in private, already was its lovely owner's name and Major Ferramore's coupled together. Of course, the story of the wreck was recounted everywhere, though not quite accurately. Somehow, it was known that the Major had been instrumental in Gertrude's preservation, but not that Lucie had fallen a sacrifice to it.

Did George Ferramore really love the widow? Had he, as his young wife had warned him, played a dangerous game until he had fallen into the meshes beyond extrication?

If so, where was the barrier to the accomplishment of his desires? Gertrude apparently divined his secret; still, was kindness itself. In all things he was treated as the most honored guest. Nevertheless, in that gay, light-hearted company, a close observer would have seen that Major Ferramore was not at ease. His manner was marked by a certain excited restlessness, as of one who, in the fever of pursuit, is tormented by a vague sensation that he moves hardly by his own will, and that the goal he is striving to attain is not that at which he would have aimed when first starting in life.

One evening when Gertrude had accepted a challenge from one of her guests to play chess, Major Ferramore, sauntering to that part of the drawing-room where, unless wanted, the companion usually sat quietly at work, threw himself on a chair near, and with an evident sigh of relief, said, "What a haven of peaceful rest appears to reign in this particular corner of yours, Mrs. Hendricson! It almost makes one envious."

"Envious!" and the companion shook her head with a faint smile. "Major Ferramore's life, past and present, must be very different to what I imagined it, before he would think me a subject to envy."

"That may be, Mrs. Hendricson. We all have our private histories, our hidden skeletons, I suppose. No doubt you have yours?"

"Let these testify!" remarked Mrs. Hendricson, lightly touching the silvered braids of dark hair.

"In that case, you must have suffered much," said the officer, sympathetically

"I have; very much. There are some sorrows which scar the heart ineffaceably."

"And such have been yours?" pursued Major

Ferramore, interested. "Yet how quietly, how placidly you bear it, Mrs. Hendricson!"

The companion slightly raised her shoulders.

"Time brings resignation, Major Ferramore. If you had suffered when as young as I, and now were as old, you would find it so."

"I doubt that," he answered, playing thoughtfully with one of her reels of cotton. "Women bear more patiently than men; in all things save strength are man's superior, and in nothing so much as their self-devotion in love."

The companion, looking up, saw the Major's eyes fixed dreamily on Gertrude, who, her chin resting on her hand, was leaning slightly over the chess-board, considering her next move. She indeed was beautiful. Did the officer mean her?

"Mrs. Hendricson's lip curled as, with a smile, she rejoined, "You flatter our sex, I am sure. Probably," and she lifted her eyes to him, "you speak from experience?"

The officer did not reply. His gaze was still upon Gertrude, who was laughing gayly over the prospect of checkmating her adversary, and he sighed.

"That is the second time I have heard you sigh, Major Ferramore," said Mrs. Hendricson; "and you are the last person I should have imagined doing so."

"And why?" he demanded, quickly.

"Those who sit apart generally see more than the actors. Would it offend you if I say I have your secret?"

"You would not offend me," he rejoined, in a hurried whisper, "if you said that you had hers."

"You mean whether she returns your affection, and after the time fashion demands will consent to wed with you?"

"You put it certainly in a straightforward way," remarked the officer, coloring.

"Am I not right?"

"If I admit it?"

"Then I answer, it requires a keener person than I am, Major Ferramore, to read Mrs. Gertrude Greville. The eyes of love ought to be more clear-sighted than mine can be," said the companion, as, rising, she crossed the room to the piano, where Miss Vane was playing unattended.

The Major looked after her, a little piqued. Why had she gone? He liked talking to Mrs. Hendricson. She was so quiet, so ladylike; possessing and imparting that repose which was as a refreshing sleep after feverish delirium.

"I wonder what her trouble was?" he thought, biting his mustache. "She has my secret? Has she? Have I one? Heaven knows! Gertrude entralls me. Her loveliness holds me like a spell. I feel that I could go through fire and water for her; that she has but to command for me to perform. My brain seems in a whirl if I contemplate losing her. Yet, am I in love?"

At that very instant matters were so arranging themselves as to force him speedily to decide.

"Checkmate!" cried Gertrude, clapping her hands. Then she added, perceiving the footman by her side, "What is it?"

"A letter, ma'am, left by hand, for Mr. Helton."

Mr. Helton, Gertrude's opponent, was a well-looking, dark, rather sallow-faced aristocratic gentleman of somewhere between forty and fifty.

"For me?" he ejaculated, raising his black brows. "An error; it must be. Gad, I know no one here save yourself, my dear Mrs. Greville. Stay," he proceeded, fixing his eye-glass and examining the writing. "No, it can't be. Yet I'd vow it is his hand."

"Whose hand, love?" asked his wife, a tall, handsome, languid blonde, leaning over his shoulder.

"The Honorable Augustus Beckwith's, Clara. Mrs. Greville, with your permission," remarked Mr. Helton, as, bowing, he broke the seal, and hurriedly scanned the contents.

"What a fellow it is," he remarked, looking up, showing his white teeth and addressing the company generally. "I knew it was he. There never was such a fellow to do a kind action. I asked him a certain favor, and, instead of answering me by post, down he comes from London, in the height of the season, to Cornwall."

"That is friendship, truly," smiled Gertrude.

"Indeed, yes. Ah! Beckwith's the best fellow out. Nephew to Lord Beltonsea, and, if a few intermediate cousins were only to die off, Lord Beltonsea himself one day. Yet he thinks no more of leaving his luxurious lodgings in Piccadilly, and putting up with the discomforts of a Cornish inn for a day or two to oblige a friend, than I should to—take off my hat to a lady. For gad! it is not an inconvenience, but a pleasure."

Mr. Helton had risen while this fell easily, glibly from his tongue, and now turning to Gertrude, said, "Mrs. Greville, I am sure I may ask you generously to pardon my brief absence this evening?"

"On one condition," she smiled. "That you persuade your friend to leave the discomforts of the Cornish inn, for the better accommodation of The Holme."

"Oh, my dear madam, a thousand thanks! But Beckwith, though I confess my account of The Holme will make him envious, would never dream of intruding."

"It would not be an intrusion, but, I trust, a mutual pleasure. There, Mr. Helton, no denial, or I shall believe that Mr. Beckwith despises my hospitality. Major Ferramore, will you try your hand against mine in this mimic tourney?" she concluded, indicating the chess-board.

The officer, crossing, readily took Mr. Helton's place, who, bowing his thanks for the invitation to his friend, quitted the room.

In the hall Mr. Helton found the inn's ostler, a tall, brawny Cornishman, waiting with a lantern, which was necessary over the mile or more of wild, barren land they had to traverse. Gertrude sent out, proposing to dispatch a messenger for the Honorable Augustus Beckwith, but Mr. Helton had reasons of his own for wishing himself to go. The night was dark, the stars were dim, but the ostler knew the way well, and in little above half an hour, Mr. Helton was ushered into the presence of his friend.

And his friend was a tall, handsome, remarkably aristocratic-looking man of apparently thirty, whose elegance of figure had been done full justice to by an excellent West-end tailor. His fair hair was parted in the middle, long lashes gave a slightly languid expression to his large blue eyes, enhanced by the measured tones of his voice, and long, drooping mustache. As the other entered, he stood, one elbow on the mantelpiece, a cigarette in his fingers, and his glance inspecting his own reflection in the fly-spotted, dingy chimney-glass.

"So you have managed to come, Beckwith?" said Helton, as the door closed.

"Managed! By Jove! was it likely, old boy, I'd stop away?" answered the Honorable, throwing the cigarette end into the grate, and advancing. "As soon as I could get free of Doynton, I started. Well, how continue the odds respecting the charming widow?"

"Not so much in your favor, *mon ami*, as I at first imagined?"

"How is that? Any more horses entered for the race matrimonial?" asked the Honorable, with interest.

"Only one; but I fancy he may prove a dangerous rival!" answered Helton, tipping back his chair by a perilous angle. "A Major Ferramore, who, besides having saved her life, is evidently, as far as his recent loss will allow, in love with her."

"And she?"

Helton shrugged his shoulders, as he laughed. "Oh, mystery, thy name is woman! I never could thoroughly read the sex, and cannot fathom the widow."

"By Jove, Helton, I hope you've not brought me down on a wild-goose chase?" responded the other. "At any rate, you know the likely points of both the running horses. Which will you back?"

"You."

"You answer with most flattering readiness!" And the Honorable complacently smoothed his mustache.

"Don't be conceited with your pretty face, my Augustus," smiled Helton. "There the Major is your match. Your scoring will be in your title and expectations."

"Expectations! By Jove, with half-a-dozen healthy male cousins intervening! You still believe the widow handsome?"

"She is undeniably so."

"And regarded financially?"

"Is worth the winning! The Holme is the snuggest little estate you can imagine; while Mrs. Greville's style of living proves that the Nabob must have left her an excellent exchequer."

"Most satisfactory," responded the other, "for I must confess that at the present moment a certain Honorable's exchequer is remarkably low, and he sees no way of filling it—"

"Save by a wealthy marriage," broke in the other.

"Exactly. But now, as to entering the fortress?"

"That difficulty is got over already. I read your letter aloud; rolled out your title and expectancy; and declared you had left the luxuries of Piccadilly for the discomforts of an inn, merely to perform an act of kindness for me, your friend."

"Quite true."

"True?"

"Certainly. If I get first to the winning-post, do I not hand over to my dear friend five hundred or a thousand, as the charming widow's exchequer will permit?"

"Ah, yes! So far, the matter is mutual. But, to proceed. Mrs. Greville, hearing my description of my worthy friend, insisted that he should take up his abode at The Holme. I bring the invitation with me, my dear boy, and shall wait to take you back."

"I will not, in that case, detain you long, for, as you may understand, my portmanteaux are as yet unpacked."

The Honorable Augustus Beckwith was as good as his word, and the rather dilapidated inn chaise was speedily driving the two across the moor to The Holme.

"Oh, came ye by the barren moor?"

murmured the Honorable. "By Jove! what a dreary place it is! Not a very enticing spot for a midnight ramble."

"I'd advise you not to try it, for the place is a pitfall of disused mine-shafts. Take the wrong path, and, gad! a man would be in the other world before he could say Jack Robinson. But there are the lights of The Holme."

Very shortly after the Honorable Augustus Beckwith stood in its brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, bowing to its fair owner.

"Well," inquired Helton, entering his friend's apartment after the household had retired for the night, "what is your opinion?"

"I have formed three," answered Beckwith, bringing himself in from the open window, where he had been enjoying a meditative smoke. "That Gertrude Greville is beautiful, that she is rich, and that I, my dear fellow, and no other, shall win and wear her."

"And Major Ferramore?"

"Bah! Once, when I held her in conversation, she passed over a remark of his unnoticed, and once she took my side of an argument adverse to his. For a first evening, Helton, my boy, those are signs which speak strongly in my favor. But who is that staid, middle-aged personage, Mrs. Hendricson?"

"Mrs. Greville's companion."

"I don't like her. She sees all—I might say watches all—but says nothing. I mistrust her."

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GREVILLE RECEIVES A SHOCK.

It soon became apparent to all at The Holme that the Honorable Augustus Beckwith was enthralled by Gertrude Greville's charms, and that in him the Major had a powerful rival.

To no one was this more plain than to George Ferramore himself. Gertrude was a skillful coquette, hence he intuitively felt rather than saw the preference that was given to Beckwith. Openly, he had no complaint to make, even on the score of their friendship. Nevertheless, he knew his star had waned before that of the new-comer; and, according to human nature, it aroused his pride and heated his passion.

He considered himself unjustly treated, ill-used by Gertrude. What had he not done for her? What had he not sacrificed for her? Was he, after all the past, to be ousted for another?

As had grown to be his custom, he took his griefs to Mrs. Hendricson. The latter generally sat in a private parlor after breakfast, making the daily arrangements, giving orders to the servants. Here the Major would lounge in, and here he found her one morning about a week after Augustus Beckwith's arrival.

"You do not look very well, Major Ferramore," said the companion, glancing up from her housekeeper's book. "I observed it at breakfast."

"Did you? It was very kind of you, I am sure, to take that interest, Mrs. Hendricson. Just like you," he answered, as he went and leaned on the mantelpiece near the small table.

"Just like me?" she smiled. "How do you mean?"

"That you possess one of those pure, sweet, unselfish, womanly natures which is ever thinking of others before yourself."

Mrs. Hendricson raised her eyes rapidly. The pen she held slid from her fingers.

"And have you read me thus, Major Ferramore?" she murmured, in a low tone. "Believe me, I feel complimented."

"Truth is not compliment," he proceeded. "May I tell you really what I think?"

"I should be flattered by the confidence."

"That you are one on whom a man might place his trust, and never be deceived; who would be a support, a comfort to those you cared for in the hour of trouble, and would offer yourself a sacrifice for them. One of those gentle feminine natures to which a strong man clings in time of trouble."

"Do you really think that?" said Mrs. Hendricson, leaning over her housekeeping book. "Major Ferramore, you could not have given me a character which so well pleased me."

"Which so well suits you, rather," he answered. "Goodness and you, Mrs. Hendricson, I believe to be synonymous. Have you ever awakened with the consciousness of having dreamed a perfectly happy dream, though you could recall no incident, and all through life you remember that moment as a sweet memory?"

"Yes; most people have done so, Major Ferramore, I imagine."

"Then you, Mrs. Hendricson, seem like an embodiment of that memory—of some happy period passed."

Mrs. Hendricson was silent a space, making some entry in her book. Then, with a little laugh, she replied, "Really, Major, if you talk like that, I shall have to forbid these little meetings of ours."

"Pray don't do that," he ejaculated, earnestly. "You do not know of what a comfort you would deprive me."

Mrs. Hendricson, slightly turning bent her eyes, which looked very bright through her spectacles, upon him.

"Major Ferramore," she said, in her steady, monotonous tones, "when I first saw you here I believed you the happiest man under the sun—a man who had got his dearest wish fulfilled, and instead—"

"You see me the most wretched," he broke in.

"Why?"

"Can you ask, Mrs. Hendricson?"

And he laughed a trifle bitterly.

"Surely your eyes have discovered it? Confess—yes. I am sure I may trust you for my confidante."

"You may, indeed."

"Then has not Mrs. Greville treated me most unjustly, eh? After—after all, she is gradually setting me aside for this—this Augustus Beckwith!"

And the Major, pulling his mustache, began pacing the room.

Mrs. Hendricson, rising, leaned against the mantelpiece, as she answered, quietly, "Don't you think, Major Ferramore, in the end you may be happier for being put aside? Mind, I, too, speak in confidence."

Halting, he abruptly confronted the speaker.

"Pray explain," he said, a shade stiffly. "I do not comprehend."

"Then, a little while back, I told you that I guessed your secret—you loved Mrs. Greville. I now recall that assertion, for only now have I your secret. You do not love Mrs. Greville!"

"Not love her!" exclaimed the officer, starting.

A moment he stood silent, thoughtful, as though the declaration had struck some secret chord in his mind.

Abruptly, however, he threw up his head, saying, "No, Mrs. Hendricson; you were right at first, you are wrong now. I do love her. You would say I am but fascinated, but under the spell of her witchery. I swear to you, over and over again have I thought so myself—have tried to convince myself it is so."

"Not, I fancy, very strongly."

"Probably not, for—for it is not delusion, it is love. If not, should I stay here?—should I feel this jealousy of this Mr. Beckwith? No! I tell you I love Gertrude Greville! I would do her slightest bidding for a smile! I would die for her! In fact, I—I would do any thing rather than see her—after the past—another's, Mrs. Hendricson!"

He was pacing the room again, irritable from checked passion.

"Mr. Beckwith must look to himself. I have sacrificed too much—you know not how much—to be now turned aside by a rival."

"Major Ferramore," said the companion, her eyes bent on the empty fire-grate, "you should not say such things to me. But this I again unhesitatingly repeat, the feeling possessing you is not love. You are jealous—you are passionate—you are under a delusion. A trifle may serve to open your eyes; your destiny depends on whether that trifle ever arrives. Mrs. Greville is beautiful, but she is selfish—false. Your inner self is conscious of this, though at present you are not."

"Mrs. Hendricson!" ejaculated the officer, amazed, and with knitted brows, as he regarded the quiet, firm-spoken woman before him.

"Major Ferramore," she said, extending her hand, "I did not mean to offend you, you are sure of that. You are the last I would make miserable. Remember, what I have said was in confidence."

"I will not forget; but you are wrong," he said, a little coldly, as, taking the hand, he touched it with his lips.

"Let time show," remarked Mrs. Hendricson. "There! Hark! Here is some one. Come in."

It was a servant to inform the Major that the horses were waiting. Wishing the companion "Good-morning," he at once hastened away.

At breakfast, a riding party had been proposed into Launceston, and when the Major reached the drive, he found not only the horses, but the guests, some of them already mounted.

He bit his lip to find Gertrude among the latter, and, with Augustus Beckwith close to her rein, already proceeding toward the lodge gates.

Gertrude Greville never looked better than

on horseback, and as George Ferramore saw the two—her face turned smilingly toward her companion, who bent low toward her from his saddle—his heart burned with jealousy and fury.

Proceeding to his horse, he was in the act of flinging himself into the saddle, with the intention of breaking the dangerous talk between those two, when the mellow tones of Mrs. Helton arrested him.

"Major Ferramore, dare I ask your assistance for me to mount? I have dismissed Helton, he is so clumsy. Indeed, no one can do it I protest, like you."

The officer could not but comply, muttering a curse deep down in his throat against all blondes. Certainly if the lady had thought to please him by her compliment, she failed.

Her large blue-gray eyes smiled without response, and his fury almost was beyond control when first she dropped her whip, then entreated him to fasten the button of her gauntlet. When finally he sprung into his saddle, to his annoyance he found all the rest were riding down the avenue, and he was alone with Mrs. Helton.

As a gentleman, he could not leave her.

Was it a plot against him—a plan to separate him from Gertrude?

He began to believe so; that these three, the Heltons and their friend, were playing into each other's hands to secure Gertrude.

"But, by Heaven, they shall not succeed!" muttered the officer, through his teeth. "If any one's, she shall be mine!"

If a woman was ever hated, it was, at that moment, Mrs. Helton. If a woman perfectly well knew it, it was she.

Major Ferramore fretted and fumed under the restraint. In vain he strove to increase the pace, or find an excuse for joining the rest. She apparently did not understand.

Suddenly an opportunity occurred.

They were traversing a broad, flat country road, that refracted the sun's rays with a white, dazzling glare.

Far in advance were Gertrude and Augustus Beckwith. As a barrier rode the rest of The Holme party. No other figure broke the scene save that of a solitary pedestrian advancing from the direction in which they were going.

Major Ferramore's eyes, fixed jealously on those two, saw not the other.

He was a middle-sized, respectable-looking man, of about five-and-thirty, with a keen, intelligent countenance, and the appearance of a commercial traveler.

He walked with the air of a man taking a purposeless stroll. His gaze strayed idly from object to object. It was natural, therefore, that the equestrian party should attract his notice.

"As nice a turn-out of mounts as ever I saw," he remarked, critically.

Then abruptly he came to a dead halt, swinging half round on his heel.

Could it have been that sudden movement which frightened Gertrude's horse, causing it quickly to rear, and swerve away, coming almost in violent contact with Augustus Beckwith's?

Or was it the strong, sharp gripe of the rider's hand shortening the rein, as with the other she gathered the veil she wore quickly about her face?

The next moment, the animal again swerving, and thus escaping the Honorable Augustus Beckwith's grasp, darted quickly forward.

It was this Major Ferramore beheld.

"Great Heaven!" he ejaculated; "what's the matter with the brute? He has shied—he has bolted!"

Whereupon he started off at full speed, followed by Mrs. Helton.

Long before she was reached—indeed, almost immediately—Gertrude had brought the animal under control. She was very pale, but met all inquiries with a laugh. "I never knew Dunrobin act so badly before," she said. Then, as her eyes turned from one of the gentlemen's

faces to the other, "I hope I have not startled you?"

"Indeed, yes," exclaimed Major Ferramore, in so low a tone she alone heard. "How could danger threaten you without startling me, at least, Gertrude?"

She looked up quickly, meeting the earnest light of his eyes. Hers fell instantly; a pink flush rose to her cheeks. There was an expression of satisfaction on her lips.

"I fear much, Mrs. Greville, you at least have been startled," here broke in Augustus Beckwith. "Pray let us return, and, for today, give up this excursion."

"Return?" repeated Gertrude, rapidly, almost sharply. "By no means. Pray, Mr. Beckwith, give me credit for stronger nerves;" and she laughed. "We will proceed."

This time, as she galloped on, she kept nearest the young officer.

"It is *this* one," she murmured, *sotto voce*, through her yet pale lips, "from whom I may exact service, should I need it."

As the words formed themselves, Gertrude gave one rapid glance over her shoulder.

"He is still there—still!" she added. "No—impossible! All was too hurried! He could not have recognized me?"

As the party rode away, the man who had placidly watched the late occurrence, proceeded along the path.

"If that was not Gertrude," he ejaculated, emphatically, "then it was her spirit! No; it is not likely that I should ever forget that countenance!"

He went on thoughtfully, his face contracted. Within half a mile he met a field-laborer plodding along the road. The man stopping, inquired of him about the riding party.

The laborer could give him every information. "In t' parts everybody knew Mrs. Greville and t' party at T' Holme."

After which, the commercial traveler, still meditative went on.

CHAPTER VII.

"MAJOR FERRAMORE, SAVE ME FROM THAT MAN!"—THE MINE-SHAFT.

"THE gentleman, if you please, ma'am, says he would be obliged if you could see him for a few minutes. He told me to add, ma'am, the matter is important."

The speaker was Mrs. Greville's footman, and he was addressing Mrs. Greville herself, as she stood searching in a book-rack that stood on a table in the bay-window recess of the drawing-room.

Gertrude paused, her hand on the books, yet for a moment not speaking. Even when she took the card the man held to her, she did not raise her head. Once her eyes rested on the slip of pasteboard, then the long, slender fingers slowly crushed it in her palm as, in a clear but low tone, she said, "I do not know this man, Treherne. Where is he?"

"In the library, ma'am. He—he looked respectable, ma'am," added the footman, apologetically.

"No doubt. That will do. I will see him. You need not wait."

When alone, she did not move for a space, but remained slightly bent over the table. Yet her eyes beheld no object upon it.

"I have been expecting it all day, and it has come," she murmured, huskily. "He did know me, then!"

She looked back into the drawing-room.

A subject of general interest had been started, and the conversation was being carried on with animation by all. Gertrude herself had come to seek a book in reference to the topic. All were too occupied, even Mrs. Hendricson, busy at work at her usual table—to observe her.

In a second, Gertrude Greville had passed through the open windows onto the broad, firm gravel-path that ran around three sides of the house.

The night was dark, starless and oppressively sultry. Had it not been the latter, Gertrude was too agitated to remember she had no cov-

ering, save the delicate, soft lace, over her ivory shoulders.

Rapidly she moved from the lighted windows to the other side of the house, where all was dark, and a grove of trees shadowed it.

Here she paced to and fro, her beautiful head drooping, her lips compressed, her hands clenched, and the soft folds of her evening dress causing a low whish-whish as she moved and sharply turned.

After ten minutes she paused, and pressed her hands to her temples.

"Why do I delay the moment?" she thought. "Have I not reasoned out such an occurrence as the present since this morning? Have I not arranged for it should it come? And—it is here! I must, if the worst be as I fear, temporize—gain time—time, until to-morrow!"

By an effort she seemed to steady her nerves, then re-entered the house by a side door. Reaching the hall, she crossed to the library, and as she placed her grasp on the handle, fancied that she heard some one on the stairs.

But all was silent. No one was there. Going back to the library, she opened the door, and the next moment stood before the commercial traveler.

Five, ten minutes—a quarter of an hour—half, but Gertrude had not reappeared in the drawing-room. Hardly had she gone than Major Ferramore had noticed her absence, and gradually had dropped out of the conversation.

He knew she had left by the window. He must have seen her had she crossed to the door. Had she felt the heat too oppressive, and been seized with faintness?

Impatiently he watched the ormolu clock until the half-hour was growing to forty minutes; then, unperceived, managed to quit the room into the grounds.

He had hoped and expected to see Gertrude's graceful figure there, but was disappointed. He walked in every direction without success. Then, having no mind to return to the guests, he found another entrance into the house, crossed the hall and entered the library. It was dimly lighted; that is, the lamps were shaded, emitting a mellow twilight.

On the threshold he stopped, for he perceived the room was occupied by Mrs. Greville herself. She had not heard his entrance, but was standing by the window, one hand grasping the heavy curtain, which she held back, her tall figure slightly inclined, as if she were intently contemplating the stormy night.

The Major paused. Ought he to advance?

Why not?

Was she not alone?

How rarely he found her so now!

Why should he lose so excellent an opportunity?

The remembrance of his jealousy that morning, his fear that Augustus Beckwith might outrival him, urged him, and he approached noiselessly over the thick-piled carpet at her side.

"What do you find so charming in the aspect of such a night, Mrs. Greville—dear Gertrude?"

The last name dropped softly from his lips as he gently put his hand on hers.

With a startled cry, almost one of terror, she turned upon him.

She was deathly pale.

"Great Heaven, Gertrude!" he cried, in alarm; "what is the matter?"

For a space it seemed as if she could not speak, though she tried. She regarded him with a vague, frightened stare, leaning back from against the open window.

"Gertrude, my dearest love!" he proceeded, drawing nearer. "Speak! What is the matter? Tell me! Would I not die to serve you?"

Abruptly her hands caught his arm. She bent toward him.

"You would?" she ejaculated, almost in a whisper.

"Can you ask, Gertrude? Dearest, try me."

"I will—I must, Major Ferramore—George! Free me from that man!"

As she spoke she pointed from the window. The officer, peering into the gloom, beheld a man slowly crossing the broad sweep of lawn at an angle to the small boundary gate.

"Who is he?" asked the Major.

"My enemy—my cruel, bitter enemy—one who holds my happiness in his hands, and will be pitiless!" she answered, wildly, entreatingly. "He has come here to threaten. To-morrow he will perform. Oh, George—George Ferramore"—and casting herself at his feet, she caught his hand in hers—"you say you love me, and I believe you do! To you I owe my life. Let me also owe to you my happiness. Save me from that man!"

"Gertrude, tell me but how I may, and I will, I swear it!" he replied, excited, bewildered, as he leaned over her.

"Then—then," she proceeded, hurriedly, her dark eyes riveting his, "he has to return to the village across the moor. He is a total stranger to the way. George—George, if you love me, let him not reach the other side!"

"Great Heaven!"

In his amaze he would have recoiled; but her hands held him. She drew herself to his feet.

"George—George," she pleaded, "if you really love me, you will save me. You know not what urges me to make this request. You know not how I have suffered—how through this man, without your aid, I may be made to suffer. You alone can help. Listen! This hand—this heart shall be yours! Save me and I will be your wife. Decide, for the matter will not bear delay."

As she ended, she dropped on the floor prone, her dark hair streaming over her white shoulders.

Major Ferramore's brain was in a whirl. He was lost to reason. All that he was conscious of was the misery, the distress of the beautiful woman at his feet. So placed, how few could have remained calm or self-possessed. Bending over her, however, he said, tremulously, "Gertrude, what is there between you and that man?"

"Nothing—I swear it—nothing!" she answered, rising up with his aid. "George, from you I will not hide the truth. Yonder man was a lover before I left for India. With girlish vanity I seemed to favor his suit. I never meant any thing serious. I have returned, my position altered. He has discovered me—would wreak his vengeance upon me for the past. But"—and she drew herself erect, while her eyes, with a tender, sad, caressing expression, rested on the officer—"I will not live to be the victim of his revenge—to have my sole hope of happiness destroyed by the villainy of this man. Every one has the means to escape suffering in their own hands. If he survives this night, I will not."

"Gertrude," ejaculated Major Ferramore, horror-stricken, "you would not attempt self-destruction?"

"Why not? Is not death happier than a life where all hope is crushed? Yet—yet"—and she put her hand tenderly on his arm—"it is hard to die so young. George—George, it is very hard! Will you not save me?"

He caught her to him, pressing his lips to her forehead, as he answered, excitedly, "Yes, Gertrude, I will save—preserve that life which now by your promise I hold as mine. And fear that man no more. Leave him to me."

"George!" she softly murmured, as she touched her lips to his cheek.

The contact seemed to send fire through the officer's veins as, breaking away, he sprung through the open window into the grounds.

With a strange expression, Gertrude followed his retreating form with her eyes.

"If my plan fails," she reflected, "with safety may I leave my enemy to George Ferramore."

Then, composing her features, she returned to the guests.

Meanwhile, the officer strode quickly after the man. For long now he had been out of sight, but Major Ferramore knew by this time

the paths over the barren waste land accurately, therefore had no doubt of speedily overtaking him whom he was pursuing.

With what intent was he following?

Certainly not with that the beautiful siren at The Holme contemplated—hoped.

Murder was as far from Major Ferramore's thoughts as mistrust of her who had sought to urge him to it.

He followed, purposing to overtake this man; to inform him that Gertrude had confided her trouble to him, and that henceforth with him, Major Ferramore, the other would have to deal.

He purposed to make him renounce his threatened vengeance on a weak woman for a girlish indiscretion, and force him to quit Cornwall instantly.

How he was to effect this he took no time to consider. Men, when under the influence of strong excitement, such as the Major's at that moment, are incapable of reasoning.

Out beyond The Holme boundary; out onto the heath, with the heavy thunder-wrack flying overhead.

All objects indistinct in the oppressive summer night gloom, or looming forth in mere outline masses.

No man in front, nor to right or left.

Had Major Ferramore missed him?

Surely he could not so speedily have got beyond being overtaken.

On the horizon was a faint, pale gray haze of light.

It was immediately in front of him.

Kneeling, he looked along the ground.

Yes; he saw the man now. He was kneeling too. What was he doing?"

Rising, the officer went on.

Suddenly he saw a faint flash of light. The man had struck several lucifers, or tapers, together, and was examining the ground. Why?

The truth broke upon the Major. He had reached the spot where the path, little more than a sheep track, separated into two, one leading to the village, the other to the unprotected mouth of the old mine-shaft.

Gertrude had said he was a stranger to the way. He had deceived her, for that could scarcely be. He evidently knew of the existence of those two paths, and was seeking the right one.

Major Ferramore had halted during these speculations. Now he gave a start and a low cry of surprise, blended with alarm.

The man finally had taken the path leading to the mine-shaft, and was pursuing it at a quick pace.

Did he know what he was doing? Was he a stranger, after all, and in ignorance had selected the wrong route?

Suddenly a horrible thought occurred to him.

He recalled how he had come upon Gertrude Greville unexpectedly. He recalled her position, the pallor and agitation of her features. He recalled, too, her words—"If he survive this night, I will not."

He, the Major, had appeared, and she had appealed to him.

Supposing he had not come?

The officer reeled at the words which followed.

Had she herself sought to remove this man by directing him to take the wrong path?

It was difficult to believe. He fought against it, but it clung to him the more as the mists seemed clearing from his brain. One thing was to him imperative—that the man must be warned of his danger.

Quickening his pace to a run, Major Ferramore was in the act of raising his voice, when, as if it had detached itself from the surrounding gloom, he saw a female figure, enveloped in some long garment that gave indistinctness to the form, emerge and approach the man.

He perceived the latter stop, and the two talk earnestly.

After all, it was an assignation. The man had come this way to meet that woman. What was he to do? He could not return to The

Holme until he had freed Gertrude from her enemy, even if he saw him at the inn itself.

One thing was evident. He could not accost him with that third party present. Who could she be?

So occupied, and slackening his rate of walking, he followed, keeping the two, who were now going on together, and still in the direction of the mine-shaft, just in view.

At this juncture, the thunder-wrack, accumulated in density, seeming to stoop to the earth, Major Ferramore lost sight of the two figures.

The deeper darkness was but transient. Yet before it lifted, leaving the atmosphere lighter than previously, the loud piercing cry of a man cleft the air.

It was followed by a fainter one, like a muffled echo; then all was silent.

Then the clouds lifted, and Major Ferramore knew that the dim outlined rise of ground before him was the old mine-shaft.

"Merciful heavens!" he cried, as he ran forward; "they have gone in—they are killed!"

Madly he shouted, grasping the rugged sides, and peering into the black, awful chasm.

Not a sound but the reverberation of his own voice answered.

He knew that once over that fatal brink even the recovery of the body was impossible.

Yet it was so terrible to be able to lend no aid. Still, how could he?

Wildly he gazed around, with the vague hope of yet seeing these two figures.

No—everywhere blank!

Stay; what was that moving yonder in the direction of The Holme? It had vanished now, but not before Major Ferramore had recognized it as the figure of the woman.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, shuddering. "She is safe! It is he only who is killed! Horrible!—horrible!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARED—DO NOT DESERT ME.

"WHAT can ha' come t' him? Where can he ha' got to? It's a mystery, it is. He wur a very respectable gent, but not quite o' that sort as would ha' been asked t' stop at The Holme all night."

The above was addressed to the lady at the "Tamar Inn" to his wife, as, taking his hat, he prepared to start for The Holme to inquire for news of his late guest, Mr. Grimshawe.

He sat up for him until a late hour, but the guest had not returned to the supper ordered by him before setting forth. Day had dawned and advanced toward noon, yet Mr. Grimshawe had not returned.

He had told the landlord, on starting, that he was going to The Holme; consequently the landlord went there, naturally, to make inquiries.

Reaching the servants' quarters, Treherne, the footman, could but tell him that Mr. Grimshawe had called and sent in his card to Mrs. Greville, who, declaring her ignorance of the name, had yet consented to see him. After that, how or when Mr. Grimshawe took his departure, the footman knew nothing.

Would Mrs. Greville kindly see the landlord?

Treherne didn't know, but would inquire. She wasn't very well that morning; indeed, he, Treherne, didn't know what had come over everybody. There was the Major going about as pale and wretched-looking as a ghost. Only Mrs. Hendricson was as usual; in fact, if anything, she was brighter.

Returning, he brought word that Mrs. Greville was in her boudoir, and would see the landlord.

What did this beautiful, composed woman, before whom he stood admiring and respectful, know of Mr. Grimshawe? Nothing.

That is, she would gladly tell him all she knew. It appeared that he had been acquainted some years ago with a young person who had been in Mrs. Greville's family, and had called to ask information of that young person.

Unfortunately Mrs. Greville could give him none, having lost sight of the party in whom he was interested on her (the speaker's) going to India.

Whereupon Mr. Grimshawe had taken his departure. Which way? By the library window, across the lawn, it being the shortest, and he feared the breaking of the storm.

"Then I tell you what, my lady," remarked the landlord, decidedly, "t' thing's clear. T' poor gentleman's down t' mine-shaft!"

Mrs. Greville uttered a cry of horror.

"Impossible! Surely he knew his way, coming, as he did alone?"

"He'd ha' none with him, my lady; and I gave him the direction plain; but cooning an' going over t' moor are two different matters. Be sure he's in t' shaft."

"If you fear that, can no means be taken to discover?"

The question was put with real interest. The landlord shook his head gloomily.

"That's t' mine that was flooded, my lady, and any who goes in never comes out, dead or alive! Many thanks, my lady, for your kind attention. I'll trouble you no longer."

As the door closed upon the landlord, Gertrude drew a deep breath of relief.

"Neither dead nor alive!" she repeated, softly, as she leaned back in her chair. "That is fortunate; the future is still my own. But I must play out my game now quickly."

Her mind reverted to Major Ferramore. Since they had parted in the library, she had not him seen.

On coming back the previous night, he had gone straight to his room, sending word that he begged her to excuse him, as he was not well, while the footman said he was as white as a ghost.

In reply, she had sent him these words on a paper: "Tell me."

His answer, also written, was: "Your desire has been accomplished without my instrumentality."

Gertrude had destroyed this, and waited, patiently as she could, until she should see the writer.

What had happened on the heath?

Whatever had, she knew by that brief note it had changed Major Ferramore toward her.

She questioned herself as to whether, after what had occurred, he would claim her promise? She hoped so.

When would he come? She desired, at the same time feared, the interview.

She raised her head, aroused by a tap at the door.

In reply to her "Come in!" Major Ferramore entered.

The pallor of his features, the heavy, haggard expression of his eyes, told how sleepless had been the night.

His countenance was grave; his manner cold and distant.

As Gertrude Greville perceived it, she bowed her face on her hands.

"You need not speak, Major Ferramore," she murmured, plaintively. "I read my condemnation in your features! I deserve it! I am a miserable—a guilty woman! Yet, remember, you came upon me in an hour of madness—of desperation! I was not half conscious of what I either said or did. I only know that in that moment of bitter trial you appeared—you, whom alone in all the world I could dare to trust—you in whom alone I could confide—my only friend!"

He did not approach her. If her words had moved him, he did not show it.

Leaning one hand on a chair, he said, "I have come, Mrs. Greville, to inform you of my intention to leave The Holme."

She shivered. A sound like a sob broke from her.

"I expected this, Major Ferramore. I deserve it," she whispered, humbly. "Still, may I not know what—what occurred last night?"

"You already know, Mrs. Greville, and need no information from me?"

"I!" She looked quickly up. "I know nothing!"

Her tone, her expression astonished him, for it carried conviction with it.

Had he wronged her? How sincerely he prayed that he had!

Taking a step nearer, he exclaimed, in some agitation, "Mrs. Greville, answer me truly—I entreat, I implore you! You know well that your secret is safe with me. Did you not falsely direct that unhappy man? Did you not send him on to the heath, and lure him to his death?"

"I!" ejaculated Gertrude, this time rising to her feet. "Major Ferramore, what do you mean? Am I mad still, or are you? What impels you to make this most unfounded charge?"

Rapidly, clearly he told her.

Before he had ended, Gertrude had resumed her seat. Her lips were pale, her hands tightly clasped, and evident it was to him that she listened in genuine surprise.

"Mrs. Greville—Gertrude!" he exclaimed, in conclusion; "tell me, were you not that woman?—have I wronged you?"

"Most cruelly, Major Ferramore!" she answered. "I will give you but the simple denial, for you will but have to question my guests to learn that immediately after your departure I joined them, and did not leave them again until we separated for the night."

"Then who was that woman?"

"To me that is a mystery even as to yourself!"

And the sudden anxiety on her countenance seemed to prove it.

There was a pause. Gertrude broke it.

"Major Ferramore," she said, in a low tone, "last night, in a moment of despair, I did you a great wrong. I urged you to commit a deed which I hoped would leave me free to enjoy unmolested that happy future which the possession of your love promised. I trusted in my madness that it might strengthen your affection, as it would have done mine."

"Gertrude!"

"But," she proceeded, sadly, "I now see that you are right. All must be over between us. You can but despise a woman who used her power to urge you to a crime, which Heaven kindly prevented you committing!"

"Gertrude," he broke in, seriously, "you are mistaken. When I quitted you it was with no intention to do harm to that unfortunate man. My purpose was to show him you had a friend to protect you, and to force him not to molest you. As Heaven hears me, no inducement on earth would make this hand that of an assassin!"

Starting, she looked sharply toward him. She knew what he had said was true, and in her heart rejoiced that fate had prevented his meeting the other.

"I am glad of that!" she answered. "There is one sin less upon my conscience, Major Ferramore. We are neither of us guilty. Do you still intend to go?"

"I think it best—at least for a while."

"Will you do me one favor?—though, truly, I have no right to ask it?"

"If possible, I will!"

"Thanks. Do not, then, leave The Holme until this matter has quite blown over. That man has been here, remember. Pray let nothing occur that may create the least suspicion."

He reflected; then answered, "I think that would be wise. I will remain."

"I feel too weak to thank you as I should," she said, meekly. "I owe you too much ever to repay you. I ask you to forgive, only to think as well of me as you are able, and to remember I had cause to feel bitter enmity to that man. Farewell!"

She turned from him as she spoke; her head drooped; then, as it were, timidly, nervously, she extended back her hand.

He could not, at least, forget that he had loved this beautiful woman, or had believed that he loved her. He could not see her thus tremble without being moved.

Taking her hand, he touched it with his lips. "Farewell!" he whispered. "My best wishes, Gertrude, shall be for your happiness. For myself I can but say, would that we had never met!"

He paused, yet holding her hand. Then, "Gertrude, may Heaven pardon you as I do!" he said, released her fingers, turned, and left the room.

"It is over," she thought, as she dropped back into her chair. "Better, far better than I expected. He will never betray me, and Edwin Grimshawe's death will be soon forgotten."

Major Ferramore, at the same moment, was thinking, as he reached his apartment, "I must believe her. She could not have denied with such a semblance of truth. Then who was that woman?"

That evening, at dinner, naturally the chief subject of conversation was the disappearance of the commercial traveler-looking man.

"Another nineteenth century mystery," smiled placid Mrs. Helton.

"No mystery at all, my love," remarked her husband. "When a man pops head foremost, or walks, into one of those dangerous mine-shafts, there's no mystery; everybody knows where he has gone, and so the thing ends. In fact, it is ended already."

"There you're wrong, Helton," remarked Augustus Beckwith, from his side of the table. "Having nothing better to do, I went over to the 'Tamar Inn' this afternoon to learn if there was anything fresh."

"Well?"

"Well, a fellow's come over to there from Launceston, a friend of this Mr. Grimshawe, he says."

"Come; for what purpose?"

"To make inquiries. He declares he knows something of the private history of Grimshawe, and, that if he did go down the pit, it was very probably not by fair means."

Major Ferramore's and Gertrude's eyes met. She was deathly pale. He feared she would faint; but, by a supreme effort, she commanded herself, and gave the signal for the ladies to rise. As she passed the Major, who had opened the door for their exit, she whispered, "For mercy's sake, do not desert me!"

CHAPTER IX.

GERTRUDE PLAYS HER LAST CARD—THE STORM.

THE information the Honorable Augustus Beckwith had obtained from the "Tamar Inn" was perfectly correct.

A gentleman, Mr. Lawrence Power, a thin, middled-aged man, with a quiet, business-like manner, and the blended aspect of a country attorney and London detective, had arrived there, announcing himself as the friend of Mr. Grimshawe, and declaring his intention to investigate the cause of his singular disappearance.

To the village the commercial traveler's death was no mystery. The poor man had evidently, in the darkness, fallen into the mine-shaft.

Mr. Power did not gainsay that. He merely remarked, "That those same mine-shafts were very convenient things at times."

In a quiet, business way he noted down every tittle of evidence, displaying an amount of knowledge respecting the event, as also of the sayings and doings of Mr. Grimshawe, greater than those who had been on the spot.

Naturally, he was informed of his friend's visit to The Holme, and as naturally proceeded thither to pursue his investigations.

As Mr. Lawrence Power walked toward evening up the lime-tree avenue, and looked first this side and that upon the bright, well-kept estate, a smile more than once spread over his thin countenance, and he muttered in an accent of evident admiration, "A plucky thing to do. To say the least of it—a very plucky thing!"

His request to see Gertrude was immediately granted, and he was ushered into the boudoir

where the lady was seated, apparently engaged in writing.

Whether Gertrude had or had not expected this visit, and whether or not she had taken more than ordinary care with her toilette, it is certain that she looked even more than usually beautiful. And as, with a graceful but stately inclination, she bent her dark, proud eyes on her visitor, the latter mentally confessed he had never before seen so lovely a woman.

"You desire to see me, sir," she said, in her soft, musical accents, "in regard to this late melancholy affair—the disappearance of Mr.—Mr. Grimshawe—that I believe is the name?"

Mr. Lawrence Power bowed.

"I fear I can assist you but little; but I will willingly tell you all I know."

"If, madam, you will do that, I shall be satisfied," responded the other. Then, after a glance at the door, and removing his chair nearer the writing-table, "You speak my friend's name, Mrs. Greville, as if it were strange to you."

"And, sir, how otherwise could it be?"

Because at one time, Mrs. Greville, it was familiar enough on your lips. Therefore, though nearly ten years have elapsed, you could hardly have forgotten it or him."

Mr. Lawrence Power spoke quietly, but his words were none the less effective. Gertrude's lip quivered convulsively; her white teeth pressed together.

"I do not comprehend you, sir!" she succeeded in replying, haughtily.

"Pardon me, madam, if I give no credence to that assertion. Listen, Mrs. Greville. To a business man, such as I am, time is money; while, in any case to waste it is unnecessary. Between you and me there need be no beating about the bush. You, at least, will understand that when I say I am conversant with all Mr. Grimshawe's affairs, I know how once you were friends—he, a lover; how, the other day, he recognized you, though, by making your horse rear, you tried to prevent his doing so. I know that he sought an interview here in the evening. I know what must have been the subject of that interview. You saw in him a man who, by lifting his voice, could bring all this glorious fabric you have so skillfully, so daringly, erected, about your ears. Mr. Grimshawe returned not to the inn and the supper he had ordered!"

"And, sir," demanded Gertrude, fiercely, defiantly, through her teeth, "if all you have dared to assert were true, what had I to do with it?"

"That, Mrs. Greville, will be my care to prove."

"You are a lawyer, sir?"

"I am."

"To prove, you must have proofs."

"I have them; and witnesses!"

"What?"

The word broke from her lips involuntarily, and she sat suddenly erect.

"Exactly. That you parted from Mr. Grimshawe under a semblance of contrition—of friendship; that you pressed his hand in parting, and took most especial care to direct him to follow the *wrong* path over the heath."

"Great Heaven!" gasped Gertrude, dropping back, white and trembling.

A moment she was silent. Then said, hoarsely, "Your witnesses speak falsely. Direct him I did, but to the right path; not the wrong. My word, surely, is as good as theirs?"

"It would be, madam, if, by Mr. Grimshawe's death, they looked to gain a similar advantage—the preservation of a dangerous secret."

"Do you mean, sir, that I—I would have attempted this man's life?" she asked, sharply.

"Why not, Mrs. Greville? You are playing a dangerous game. You are a brave, a resolute, a desperate woman. Who in this house had any desire for Mr. Grimshawe's death save you?"

Gertrude, her elbow on her chair, covered her eyes with her hand, apparently in thought.

Suddenly glancing up, she said, haughtily,

"And, sir, supposing this witness of yours should out-swear me—gain credence where I could not—what would be the result?"

"Your arrest, madam."

"Mine? On what charge?"

"Murder—at the least, manslaughter!"

Again she hid her face. When once more she looked up, her countenance was haggard, but more calm.

"You drive me close, sir," she said, hoarsely. "What you force me to do, I from necessity, not inclination, must do. I would have died rather; but"—she shivered—"I cannot stand, a criminal, for the curious to gaze at. Grant me an hour. Promise during that time to speak to no one on this matter, and, at the expiration of that period, I will give you a full account of that unhappy evening."

Mr. Lawrence Power regarded her curiously. Did she mean flight? No; Mrs. Greville was far too wise a woman to take a step which would instantly condemn her in the minds of a jury.

Besides, the space was so short, that he need never lose sight of The Holme. Again, he had strong reasons of his own for granting the request,

"Certainly, madam," he answered, rising. "The favor is too slight, considering the reward, to meet with refusal. In one hour—"

"Return here and I will keep my word."

"Agreed!"

And, bowing, Mr. Power quitted the room. When alone, Gertrude sat for some minutes immersed in painful thought.

Finally, taking her pen, she began to write hurriedly, murmuring, "It is my only chance. After doing so much, I will not lose all. The game is played out!"

The letter she wrote was to Augustus Beckwith, and ran:

"DEAREST AUGUSTUS—

"I consent. I find gratitude, after all, is less powerful than love, or I am too weak to make myself a sacrifice. Yet, as I told you, I dare not meet him—I could not, so, if your mind has not changed, an hour hence have all ready, as you proposed.

"Yours, in sincerity and faith,

"GERTRUDE."

Addressing this, she rung the bell.

"Where is Mr. Beckwith?" she asked of the footman.

"I have just passed him in the hall, ma'am."

"Alone?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then give him this note, and return to me."

On the man's coming back she told him when the person who had just left called again, which he would do in less than an hour, to see that he was shown into the library.

Then Gertrude repaired to her dressing-room, where she was busily engaged, until the period when Mr. Lawrence Power was to arrive.

He was punctual; and as he entered the room, lighted by the shaded lamps, he found Gertrude Greville attired in a plain, dark silk, awaiting him.

"It is, sir, still your purpose to pursue this unhappy matter?" she inquired, in a low tone, when he was seated.

"How, madam, could I do otherwise?"

"If you have no stronger clew to another, you arrest me?"

Mr. Lawrence Power bowed.

"Then"—and Gertrude drew a deep sigh—"against my will, sir, you force me to confess the truth."

She paused.

He leaned nearer, anxiously.

Soon she began, in a low but steady voice. "The subject of Mr. Grimshawe's interview with me was, as you stated, in reference to the past. What transpired, I do not feel called upon to relate."

"It is not necessary, madam—at least not at present."

"We parted better friends than we had met. He left by yonder window, after I had directed him the path—mark me, sir, the *right* path—to take across the heath to the village."

Mr. Lawrence Power bowed.

"Now," proceeded Gertrude, "comes the most painful portion of my story. There is a

gentleman beneath this roof at the present moment who has honored me with his affection—his love. Unhappily, coming to seek me, he entered the library unnoticed, and overheard the latter part of mine and your friend's conversation."

"From which he drew, madam—"

"The truth—that Mr. Grimshawe was a former lover, and that I stood in fear of him. When your friend had gone, he questioned me so closely, that at the moment, desperate myself, I could not control my replies. I owned I regarded Mr. Grimshawe as an enemy; that while he lived, I never could hope for happiness—never be his."

"And this gentleman?"

"Actuated by his love—I fear by jealousy—taking my hand, bade me dread the man no more."

"Yes?"

"Saying this, he hastened from the window after Mr. Grimshawe. I know no more."

Mr. Lawrence looked steadily into the face of the beautiful woman before him.

Her eyes met his unflinchingly, though sadly.

"As you must be aware, sir," she said, "this confession is very painful for me to make."

"I can understand that, madam. How did this gentleman behave on his return?"

"That is a question, sir, you must learn from my servants, as he went at once to his room. I understand, however, that he was pale and agitated."

"I will detain you no longer then, madam," remarked Mr. Lawrence Power, rising. "Your opinion is—"

The answer came clear and steady.

"That if Mr. Grimshawe was killed, Major Ferramore is his murderer!"

"No man can be so termed, Mrs. Greville," said a voice behind her, "until the body is produced. I produce that of Mr. Edwin Grimshawe, but alive—not dead!"

Gertrude had started up with a cry, and now turning, recoiled, pale, trembling, before Mrs. Hendricson, the commercial traveler, and the white, accusing features of Major Ferramore.

"What right have you all here?" she gasped, seeking to recover her composure. "What does this mean?"

"That, Gertrude Sterling, more than I know your secret now, and the dangerous game you have played," answered Mr. Grimshawe, stepping forward. "That the false direction across the heath which you gave me, intending my death, would most certainly have led to it, had not this lady saved me." And he indicated the companion.

Gertrude looked from one to the other like a beautiful tiger at bay.

Her bosom heaved, but for a space she said nothing; then—"This has been a plot—a scheme against me," she cried, with defiance. "But you cannot arrest me—you cannot touch me! I dare you to do that! You live; no one has been harmed; and I defy you!"

She glanced round, as if to perceive whether they would attempt to check her.

They were silent.

"Mr. Grimshawe," she said, haughtily, "you have made a charge which you will have to answer at another time. Until then, this house is mine, and I order you—all of you—to quit it!"

With air and step of a queen, she swept by them from the room.

Then, however, her manner changed.

Swiftly she ran to her dressing-room, hurriedly put on her outward attire, and, taking a small hand-valise, which she had prepared, hastened by a servants' staircase into the grounds.

The night was of a dense blackness.

The storm which had been beating up for so many days, was about to break at last.

The distant thunder rolled incessantly.

A heavy, oppressive stillness seemed to hold all vegetation spell-bound.

Gertrude heeded it not further than to re-

joice in the darkness which insured concealment as she moved swiftly from the house. When she had crossed the lawn, she looked back.

The lights were in the library yet. She could perceive figures within, among them Mrs. Hendricson's.

She clenched her hands with fury. She saw it all now. That woman, with her staid, quiet ways, had been a spy upon her. She must have overheard her interview with Grimshawe, and followed and saved him. Hers was the female figure Major Ferramore had seen.

At this moment she reached the gate in the boundary fence. Opening it, she saw beyond a horse and chaise, with a man standing by.

As she appeared, the latter stepped quickly forward.

"Gertrude, my darling," he exclaimed, as he caught her in his arms, "you have come!"

"Did you mistrust me, Augustus?" she murmured. "But pray do not delay. My heart yet hesitates at the step I am about to take. Still, loving you, how can I face him?"

"Better as it is, my sweet love!" answered Augustus Beckwith, quickly. "How you tremble! Fear nothing; I have arranged things too well for pursuit. We shall drive across country to Launceston, catch the night's mail to the junction, and there change for Scotland."

As he spoke, he had been placing Gertrude in the chaise, the valise at her feet. Soon he sprung up by her side, and gave the rather mettlesome animal he drove its head.

Gertrude, as he, knew the path well, and at a sharp pace they dashed over the heath. The Honorable Augustus Beckwith was not likely to spare the whip. Was not the prize he had played for won?

Gertrude Greville was his.

Onward they went—onward, while the thunder rolled nearer and louder. It threatened to be a fearful storm. Never mind; they must go through it.

Ha! the lightning at last!

Ah, what a flash!

In a second the whole heath was illuminated by the cold blue light, showing the chaise and its occupants being whirled along. Then the thunder—then another flash—dashing down as if right upon them.

So vivid was it that the horse reared up with terror. Then, seizing the bit between his teeth, bolted.

Augustus Beckwith was no bad driver, but it was beyond his power to rein in the frightened animal. Madly, with a mouth of iron, it plunged on, but fortunately in the right direction.

"Be calm, Gertrude!" exclaimed the young fellow. "Keep your seat! The brute will calm down in a few minutes!" And he took a tighter grip of the reins.

His companion made no answer. She had stooped once, raising the valise nearer her hand.

Another flash!

Once more the horse reared—halting a second. That moment Gertrude seized. Rapidly, lightly, she leaped out onto the moor, with the valise.

Before Augustus was aware of it the horse was darting on again. Then he noted her absence with a cry of horror. Had she been flung out? Was she hurt? Was she dead?

He glanced back into the wild night.

There was no sign.

Why did not the lightning come now, when it was wanted?

Ha!

A violent jolt—a bump—the young fellow felt himself flying through the air.

Then a great crash—a thousand lights danced in his eyes!

Then oblivion!

CHAPTER X.

GEORGE FERRAMORE'S EYES ARE OPENED.

WHEN Augustus Beckwith came to he found himself in bed in a strange, plainly-furnished

room. He felt weak and ill—almost too much so to wonder where he was.

A slight sound caused him to turn his head, when he perceived his friend Helton reading in a chair by the bedside.

"Hullo, old fellow!" he murmured, faintly, "are you there? What does all this mean? Where am I?"

"In the best room of decidedly not the best inn," smiled Helton. "Glad to hear you speak. Gad! you have had a narrow escape, my boy!"

"Have I been so near hob-nobbing, then, with his grim majesty?" smiled Beckwith.

"Well, no; I did not refer to that, my Augustus. But get a little stronger, and I'll tell you all."

"Bosh, Helton! I'm strong enough—weak in limb, may be, but my nerves are all right. I want to hear every thing. Of course you know—"

"That you, by Mrs. Greville's suggestion, eloped with her!"

"Exactly; but that confounded storm!"

"Stay; do not upbraid that, my dear Augustus, which, when you have heard from what it has saved you, on your knees you will bless."

"For goodness' sake, Helton," exclaimed the sick man, irritably, "stop speaking in riddles! How did I come here? Was Mrs. Greville hurt?"

"I suspect not; as, a short time after the horse and shattered trap dashed up to the door of the 'Tamar,' Mrs. Greville passed very composedly through the village, carrying a valise, on her way to the railway station. Where she is now I don't know. A party, fearing an accident must have happened by the state of the trap, started across the heath, found you insensible, and brought you here."

"That explains something but not all. Mrs. Greville—"

"Is no more Mrs. Greville than I am, but a Miss Sterling, an adventuress, of whom you were the dupe."

"No!" ejaculated Beckwith, drawing himself up on his pillow. "Go on, old fellow. You don't mean that both of us were deceived?"

"No less. It appears that, finding the dangerous game she had been playing was on the eve of exposure, she planned an elopement with you, that she might score one trick."

"Who, then, and what is she?"

"She was the housekeeper to Mr. Arthur Greville, an eccentric old fellow of over seventy, who long had renounced society, and led the life of a crabbed recluse in India, holding no communication with his relations, who were but distant ones. A sunstroke carried off the poor old gentleman one day; whereupon Miss Gertrude Sterling, who knew all her employer's affairs as well as he did himself, superintended the funeral, let the estate, realized all the money she could, and came quietly over here as Mr. Arthur Greville's widow."

"Yet she must have been sure of ultimate detection?"

"No doubt. But my idea is that she hoped before then to effect a good marriage."

"Helton," said the Honorable Augustus, "this has very nearly been a case of biter bit."

"Undoubtedly."

"But how has the detection come about?"

"First, owing to that Mr. Grimshawe who disappeared so mysteriously, but who reappeared again."

"He was not down the mine-shaft?"

"No. How all that happened I do not know; but it seems that he knew this Miss Sterling some years ago, and recognizing her as Mrs. Greville, would not believe her story, and threatened, if he did not see the marriage certificate, to make his suspicions public, besides his acquaintance with her earlier history. Secondly, the worthy rector has received a letter from a Mr. Bryerton, who, having his doubts of the charming widow, had telegraphed inquiries to a friend in Calcutta, from whom he has obtained the information I have just recounted to you."

The Honorable Augustus Beckwith laid back on his pillow with the sensation of a man who had just escaped some terrible accident.

"Helton," he said, "I must get out of this" (he meant the inn) "as soon as possible. I must get back to town."

"So must I, dear boy. Therefore drink this, go to sleep, and get strong enough as soon as you can."

The information Mr. Helton had imparted to his friend was correct in every particular.

The morning after the elopement, when the rector, amazed, confounded, walked over to The Holme, with Mr. Bryerton's letter in his pocket, to, as a friend, give Gertrude a hint of its contents, and that the heir at-law of Mr. Greville was about instantly to take proceedings, he found the Heltons already gone, the Vanes on the point of departure, and the servants in a state of alarm about their wages.

From Mrs. Hendricson, who was calm and self-possessed as usual, he learned all that had occurred.

Of Mr. Grimshawe's visit—how she, the companion, had overheard the interview, and had heard Gertrude Sterling direct Mr. Grimshawe the wrong road across the heath, and how she, following, had prevented his destruction.

Mrs. Hendricson said nothing of Major Ferramore, though she had heard that interview too.

Then the rector, having been told of the elopement and accident, no longer kept Mr. Bryerson's letter a secret, but made more visits in one day in his parish than he had ever done on any previous occasion.

Meanwhile, Gertrude Sterling, on board a Weymouth packet, was proceeding to Jersey, whence she crossed to the Continent, and was lost sight of to all in this story.

When the rector had quitted Mrs. Hendricson in The Holme drawing-room, the companion, for some brief moments, paced the apartment in deep thought.

She appeared singularly agitated.

Sometimes she would approach the door hurriedly, stop, hesitate, and move back again into the room.

Finally, as the clock chimed eleven, she seemed to make up her mind, and once more crossed to the door.

Before, however, she reached it, it opened, and Major Ferramore entered.

Yes, it was the young officer. But how ill, how changed!

"I thought I might find you here, Mrs. Hendricson," he said, advancing. "I wished to say good-by before I went, though I wonder I have courage to face you after last night. I so utterly despise myself."

"You take this too much to heart, Major Ferramore," answered the companion, kindly pressing and retaining the hand he had extended. "You look as though you had not slept."

"Slept! how could I sleep?" he ejaculated. "You know not the miserable idiot, the dupe I have been. Not only the dupe of this woman, but of myself. The last few months seem to have been the wild whirl of some feverish delirium, from which I have awakened—awakened to find that I, in my folly, my blindness, renounced true happiness for a shadow."

He had been pacing the room, half addressing the companion, half speaking to himself. Now, with a groan, he sunk upon a couch.

Mrs. Hendricson watched him, evidently with sincere compassion.

Tears, indeed, seemed in her eyes, in her voice, as approaching him, she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder, "Believe me, Major Ferramore, my heart bleeds for you."

"I know it," he answered, taking the soft fingers, and gratefully pressing them to his lips. "In all this feverish period, Mrs. Hendricson, you have been as a cool, soothing presence to me. If you do not despise me too

much," he added, humbly, "let us two continue friends."

The companion's lip trembled.

The penitence, the self-humbling of a strong man, creates exquisite pain to a pure-hearted woman.

"I trust we may ever be that, Major Ferramore," she replied. "Believe me, since our acquaintance you have interested me much. With intense sorrow I saw you, against your better nature, becoming the victim, the—pardon my saying it—dupe of a selfish, designing woman. Did I not warn you, Major Ferramore, of her before the mask had been plucked from her face?"

"You did; but I slighted the warning, as I did that of another," answered the officer, with emotion. "After the past, my lot is but the one I merit. Yet I know, could her gentle spirit behold me, she would pity—"

"You refer to your wife?" said Mrs. Hendricson.

"My unhappy, most cruelly treated wife! Oh, Mrs. Hendricson, I have been enthralled by a mad infatuation!"

"You loved her?"

"Loved her!"—and Major Ferramore started to his feet. "After what you have witnessed, how will you believe it?—but I loved her through all. I now know I never loved but her—that I was unworthy of her!"

"Tell me of her. Do you mind?"

"No; for my thoughts are constantly dwelling on her. During this period that has past," proceeded Major Ferramore, "I have sought to drive her from my memory, as one banishes good thoughts when in the act of committing evil. Now I feel my sole happiness in life can only consist in recalling, in living upon the remembrance of my sweet Lucie."

He paused, overcome with emotion.

Then he told her all.

"And not willingly, then, did you leave her on the wreck?" asked Mrs. Hendricson.

"Willingly!" he cried. "Well, true, from what you know of me why should you judge me better?"

"Believe me, I will judge you at the best," she answered, kindly. "But now, what do you propose doing?"

"Renouncing society, which no longer has charm or interest for me," he answered. "The present, the future, are dead. I have but the past to live in."

"Nay, nay; you have had a severe shock—may I say, a severe lesson?—Major Ferramore; but you are young—you will find time a kind healer. Happiness is yet in store for you, I trust."

"You mistake—never!" he answered, firmly. "Life can be but a wretched burden to one who, having abused the past, finds it impossible of recall. Farewell, Mrs. Hendricson, quitting you, I leave my only friend!"

"Farewell; but surely we shall meet again?" she murmured, with emotion, while her fingers clung about his.

"To hope so would indeed give me pleasure," he said.

"Where—where are you going to from here, Major Ferramore, may I ask?"

"Certainly," he answered, with a wan smile. "I am about to recommence my life as a recluse. I go to Stornoway."

"We shall meet—we must—again!" murmured the companion. "That address will find me."

He took the paper she gave gratefully, kissed her hand twice, said farewell again, and was gone.

As the door closed, Mrs. Hendricson made a quick movement toward it.

Then, by a violent effort, stopped.

"No, no!" she gasped—"too soon! The time has not yet arrived. Let me not commit a folly—a madness! Ah!"

There was the sound of wheels on the drive.

The companion staggered rather than walked to the window.

A chaise was rolling rapidly from The Holme.

"Gone!" cried Mrs. Hendricson; and sunk, half fainting, onto a chair.

CHAPTER XI.

ONCE AGAIN.

SIX months have elapsed.

The Holme, swept and garnished, is now in possession of Mr. Arthur Greville, heir at-law, and Gertrude Sterling is almost forgotten.

Only does Mrs. Hendricson recall her at this moment as she is whirled across Scotland to Skye.

She is not at all altered, only there is a present trouble and great anxiety on her features as she first looks at a letter she keeps clasped in her hand.

Then out onto the bleak, wintry land the train is flying through.

The letter is from Major Ferramore. It is from Stornoway, and runs thus:

"DEAR MRS. HENDRICSON:

"The end is near, and I rejoice that I am ill. The doctor calls it debility. He may be right. I know that I am dying, and hail with delight the release from a life which is a burden. He bids me arouse myself, and shake off the—as he terms it—dangerous lethargy which is hastening me to the grave. I cannot tell him that here I am alone, while there Lucie awaits me, with, I feel, forgiveness.

"Before I depart, however, I could not resist one word of farewell to her to whom I owe so much. Good-by, on this earth, kind friend, forever!

"GEORGE FERRAMORE."

The instant Mrs. Hendricson had received this she started for Stornoway.

Should she find a boat to take her over the Minch?

Looking at the wildly tossing leafless branches, she feared.

Her fears were realized.

On reaching the port in Skye, from whence she had intended to embark for Harris, she found so rough a sea that no boat would venture out.

"Would death be certain to those who tried the passage?" she asked.

"Not death, but trouble, risk, danger."

"Then," said Mrs. Hendricson, firmly, "fifty pounds to the man who is brave enough to take me over. I have no fear."

There was silence, but the reward had effect. A strong, weather-beaten Skye man accepted the offer, and Mrs. Hendricson soon was tossing on the stormy waters of the little Minch.

"The boat will never live," had been the remark on shore; and soon it was the opinion of the daring Skye man.

But the boat was good, and he and his small, sturdy crew had, to use a Breton phrase, their hearts steeped in salt water.

After many hours of fierce beating about and peril, the harbor of Harris was reached.

Mrs. Hendricson, fatigued, her dress saturated with the spray, yet would accept neither rest nor refreshment but what she could take as she traveled.

She had that which is a passport in all civilized countries—money—and was soon being conveyed from Harris to Stornoway.

It was close upon sunset when she reached it, and was ushered into Major Ferramore's room. He was seated in a pillow'd chair by the fire, pale and thin, but apparently happy.

His eyes brightened as he saw who was his visitor, and, extending his wasted hands, cried, "Mrs. Hendricson! Oh, this is kind—very kind! Now, indeed, have I nothing more to wish!"

Her veil concealed her emotion as she took his hands in hers, and murmured, "How do you think I could have stopped away? But no, no! you did not write the truth—you wrote only what you believed. You—you are not dying!"

"Yes, it is the truth," he smiled. "I am dying, because I do not care to live."

"What! have you nothing to wish for in this world?" she asked, in a low tone.

"I have one wish, a hopeless wish," he answered, gravely—"my Lucie's forgiveness, which is impossible."

"No, no! for she has forgiven long ago. George, my husband! do you not know me?"

Major Ferramore uttered a great cry, for the disguise had been swiftly thrown off, and in the woman now kneeling before him he beheld the pretty golden head and fair, fresh face of his young wife.

"Lucie!" he gasped, overcome by a mighty joy, almost too great to bear. "Alive!"

"Alive, to comfort—to support—to love you, my husband!" she answered, encircling him with her arms. "Alive to bring you back to life—to happiness! George, you will not—you shall not die now!"

"Oh, Lucie, my darling, is it a dream?" he murmured. "The Hesperus—the wreck—"

"I was saved, George, in the life-boat!"

"Saved?"

"Yes. But thinking that I had ceased to possess your love—that you were weary of me—when they asked our names, I gave as mine a strange one, that you might be free."

"Oh, Lucie!" he groaned.

"Hush, dearest," she interrupted, laying her cheek on his. "Aware, however, that this woman's subtle power would be exerted to draw you to her side—though assured your love was but a mad, transient infatuation, and that she cared little for you beyond flattered vanity—I procured the place of that companion which, while on board, she said she would require when at The Holme. Thus, love, I was able to be near you, who in all the world was still dearest to me, and on the spot to save you from a crime, had Gertrude Sterling contemplated wedding you, which, the more I was acquainted with her, the more certain I felt that she intended not to do."

"And all that while, Lucie," he murmured, "you never made yourself known!"

"Why should I, when I believed my death had been a release to you? No, George, but for the confession you made me the last evening at The Holme—but for your evident repentance—you never would have learnt other than that the sea had been my grave!"

"But, my wife, why did you not tell me then that I was the happiest instead of the most wretched of men?"

She rested her face on his breast, and was silent.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "You would not trust so sudden a repentance. You wished to prove—to test my sincerity; and you were right."

"It was so, George," she answered.

"And now—ah, Lucie! I fear to ask—to hope."

"Ask and hope, George, of me as you would have done of Lucie Markham when you first received her at the altar. I am your wife—your happy wife, George; for I feel now that nothing in this world save death ever can again come between us!"

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Major Ferramore, as he held her close—close to his bosom. "Is there any thing on earth that can surpass a pure woman's devotion?"

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